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**School involvement experiences of parents who affirm the same-sex sexual  
orientations of their children**

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**PhD Thesis**

**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG**

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**2019**

## DECLARATION

I, Henry James Nichols declare that:

- The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
  - their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
  - where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

I dedicate this Thesis to my late father, Henry James Nichols (Snr). His infinite believe in me and my ability in this mammoth of an endeavor was of indescribable value.

My sincere thanks to the following people for their contributions to this study:

First, I would like to thank our **Heavenly Father**, for without Him, I could have done none of this (*Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*)

To my supervisor, **Prof Anthony Brown and Co-supervisor, Dr. T Diale**, a heartfelt thanks for your infinite patience, support, and motivational speeches throughout the study. Your faith in me is overwhelming. I will forever be grateful for your presence in my life.

To the **youths and their parents** who agreed to **participate** in the study, thank you for your bravery and willingness to trust me with your stories. Without you this study would not have been possible.

A special thank you to **all my colleagues and friends**, for all your love, encouragement, and support. Thank you for believing in me.

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Lastly, I would like to thank the **University of Johannesburg as well as the University of the Free State** for your financial support. Without this support, the study would not have been possible.

## ABSTRACT

In 1994, South Africa became a democracy after decades of oppression and inequality. Upon the ratification of the Constitution, the South African Schools Act of 1996 inaugurated a new education system that prohibits all forms discrimination and intolerance. As part of the transformation process, the Department of Education (DoE) published a White Paper 2 on Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools to foster democratic institutional management at school level (Department of Education, 1996). The democratic imperatives in these two landmark documents requires from learning institutions that young people with same-sex sexual orientations are protected from any form of harm and discrimination. An emerging body of literature points out that regardless of progressive and favourable legislation and policy guidelines, school youth who identify with and express diverse sexual orientations to date still experience school as exclusionary, discriminatory and unsafe . Parental involvement is among the key strategies to optimize and enhance learning in the home and school ecologies. In the climate of same-sex sexual dissonance in South African schools, it is not very clear how schools work with parents whose child orientate with same-sex sexualities.

This study explored the school involvement experiences of parents who affirms the same-sex sexual orientation of their child. I argue that these experiences and expectations yield rich insights into enabling a home-school partnership by creating a safe and inclusive schooling space for the youth with same-sex sexualities, similar to those of their heterosexual identifying peers. Furthermore, the research offers a straddling of disciplines seldom undertaken in other studies on strategies to form a home-school partnership to ensure optimal academic and psychosocial development and holistic agency of their children.

Using a case study methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six (6) parents who affirm their child's same-sex sexuality as well as six (6) youth with same-

sex sexualities in the Free State and Gauteng Province of South Africa.

Findings from the study revealed that the parents who affirmed their child's same-sex sexuality were confronted with gender binaried, heteronormative and heterosexist school culture. As a result their children faced enumerate acts of discrimination on a daily basis. For this reason they wanted to get involved in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for their child. Parents recognized that this cannot be achieved due to normative deep-seated cultures along gender and sexuality constructions. Participating parents were subjected to negative experiences due to unwilling school authorities, inadequate strategies and taken-for-granted norms. The parents in this study emphasised the importance and the need of a relationship with school and that through open channels of communication regardless of their minority status. There are various South African educational policies and legislation that guarantee a safe and inclusive learning space can be created for all children. A formalised process needs to be introduced to facilitate enabling home-school environments towards optimal learning of children whose education is compromised due to othering and discrimination. An overt and structured approach toward diverse gender and sexual orientation will have to be considered to align school responses with constitutional ideals and policy requirements.



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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE TO THE STUDY**

“Many parents were shocked, but some held out that their children had the right to decide their own sexual orientation. A parent, who confirmed she knew of her youth’s sexual preference, felt that the school was wrong in segregating the children and making them disclose their sexual orientation in front of others.” (Qaqamba, 2017).

The above excerpt comes from an article where a South African school principal forced 38 teenage youths to publicly disclose their same-sex orientation to their parents. While some of these parents were shocked about this reality, others were well aware of their children’s sexual orientation and embraced it. They opposed the inhuman and unprofessional manner in which the principal dealt with the situation. Not only did the principal forcefully disclose the sexual orientation of these young girls to peers but also to parents who were all called to a meeting. One parent who was not aware of the sexual orientation of her child shared that:

“As shocked as I was learning my child was gay, I still think that there could have been better ways to handle this situation. I was embarrassed on behalf of my child, who was made to stand up and disclose her orientation”.

Taking this into account, it is significant to explore how parents, who come to realise and others who embrace and affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their child, experience the involvement with school to establish a safe and inclusive learning environment. Parental involvement in the education of their children can make a significant difference in educational attainment and development (Keane, 2007; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013 & Reynolds, 1999). This is particularly important for South Africa considering that parental involvement in school activities is growing beyond notions of academic and extra-curricular activities to broader aspects such as child development and wellbeing (Mncube, 2010). It is worth mentioning that a search in global literature yielded little evidence on parental involvement with school regarding

the inclusion of learners with diverse sexual orientation.

The significance of this investigation is that schools in South Africa were found to be unsafe for young people with same-sex sexual orientations due to peers, teacher and school administrators who abhor and reproach homosexuality (Bhana, 2014; Brown & Diale, 2017; Francis, 2017; Msibi, 2012; Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). Young people who express their same-sex sexualities in-and-around South African schools experience repressive name-calling, are isolated, vilified and discriminated against which often develops into physical and emotional forms violence (Alpaslan, Astbury & Kingdom, 2003; Francis, 2017; 2019; Kowen & Davis, 2006; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Msibi, 2012; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Wells & Polders, 2006). Research elsewhere shows that systemic homophobic behavior in schools resulted in high rates of depression (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, Sanchez, 2011), substance abuse (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2001), and victimisation (Goodrich & Luke (2009). The experiences of school victimisation on the basis of sexual orientation severely compromise academic performance of school youths manifesting in school failure, poorer grades, drop out and restricted life chances that limit vocational and career development and undermine their human potential (Brown, 2017; 2018; Brown & Diale, 2017)

The White Paper 6 holds the position that Inclusive Education in South Africa is about “accepting and respecting the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience” (DOE, 2001, p. 16). This policy guideline tasks schools to create a safe, enabling and welcoming learning environment for all learners regardless of their background (DBE, 2001). This document mandates, to those responsible for the education of all learners, to establish active working relationships between parents and schools to mitigate any form of barriers to learning. Inclusive education in South Africa calls that “transformation and change must therefore focus on the... [involvement] of ...parents and communities” to mitigate barriers to learning (DOE, 2001, p.26). In the climate of same-sex sexual dissonance in South African schools, it is not very clear how schools engage with parents whose child does not orientate with the privileged

heterosexual orientation. The excerpt in the opening paragraph and foregrounding literature on school responses to same-sex sexual orientations in South Africa does not create a very positive anticipation. There is substantial evidence in South Africa that schools are compulsory heteronormative production sites (Butler, Alpaslan, Astbury, & Kingdom, 2003; Butler & Astbury, 2005; Francis, 2017; Kowen & Davis, 2006; Msibi, 2012; Wells & Polders, 2006) that will do everything to keep things straight (Brown & Diale, 2017; Naidoo & Wilmot, 2014). Although there is significant evidence that parents react negatively to the same-sex sexual orientation of their child (Bhana, 2013; LaSala, Siebert, Fedor & Revere, 2016; Nath & Haas, 2011; Sutherland, Roberts, Struwig & Gordon, 2016), recent studies in South Africa shows there are families who have come to terms and now affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their child (Matee, 2018; Brown, 2019).

Who are parents of children with same-sex sexual orientations? Before responding to this question, I want to foreground that, in the South African context, the term 'parents' can be viewed as the biological parents, guardians, or caretakers of children (DOE, 2001). The presence or absence of parental support has a major impact on the lives of individuals with same-sex sexual attractions. Pearson and Wilkinson (2013) found that family support significantly reduces the psychological stress and symptoms resulting from victimisation experienced by youths with same-sex sexual orientations from hostile communities. Families may hold varied beliefs about why a relative orientates with or express same-sex sexual orientations and those beliefs may affect their ability to reconcile with their loved ones (Fields, 2001; Perrin-Wallqvist & Lindblom, 2015; Elizur & Ziv, 2001). Some families may respond with love and acceptance, while others may withdraw and become angry and disappointed (LaSala, 2013; Brown, 2019). Morrison and L'Heureux (2001) as well as Bouris, Guilamo-Ramos, Pickard, Shiu, Loosier, Dittus, Gloppen & Waldmiller (2010) found that parents became the guide on how to react and adjust to discriminatory and prejudiced incidents on the basis of sexual orientation. Higher levels of self-acceptance, as well as having a positive identity were attributed to positive parental reactions to the same-sex sexual orientation of their child (LaSala, 2013; Ryan, 2009). It is important at this juncture to point out that sexuality is invisible (Butler, 1990), but the conflation with gender

becomes the marker to individual's sexual orientation expression. There is an expectation that the biological sex of a person should align with socially constructed gender scripts. Those who are born with a penis should express masculine traits and the opposite for females. Schools too practice along these gender produced scripts in their culture, curriculum as well as teaching and learning spaces (Brown & Diale, 2017). Considering a home ecology where sexual diversity is affirmed and embraced, this study asked the broader question what risks do schools pose with its systemic repressive and discriminatory environment towards learners with same-sex sexual orientations. Within these opposing dichotomies of values towards same-sex sexual orientations, how do schools and parents in partnership engage in creating an enabling, safe and inclusive learning environment for young people with same-sex sexual orientations?

## **1.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF CONCEPTS USED IN THIS STUDY**

This study includes critical terminology in order to understand how and when they will be used throughout this study.

Sex, gender and sexuality for example, are often placed into binaries of male, female, homosexual and heterosexual, none of which take into account the individual's unique experience, which often does not fit into these molds and at times nullifies these rigid categories. These socially constructed theories of sex, gender and sexuality are more diverse than has traditionally been committed in literature.

This study applied some parameters in terms of operationalising these concepts and outline these definitions below:

### **Sex:**

"Sex is the traditional biological assignment to an individual of male and female at birth. Sex relates to the operation of chromosomes such as estrogen and testosterone that are often accompanied by anatomical structures such as a penis, scrotum, testes, uterus, vagina, clitoris, and so on" (Curra, 2000, p.230).

### Gender:

“Gender refers to the attitudes and feelings related to masculine and feminine. Gender is not a natural, biological fact” (Moon, 1995, p.496). Gender is often socially constructed with scripts that regulates male and female behaviours. These gendered scripts presents itself in various ecologies in society. This study will particularly explore who these gender scripts shape home-school partnerships.

### Gender diversity:

Gender diversity refers to the experience of transgender or gender identity beyond biological and binary notions of male and female, man and woman. It celebrates the diversity in sex and gender and gender expressions (Diamond, 2002).

### Sexuality:

Sexuality refers to sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people (Francis, 2017). These attractions could produce a desire to continue towards romantic relationships or sexual bonds.

### Sexual diversity:

Sexual diversity, refers to all the diversities of sex characteristics, sexual orientations and gender identities, without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviours, or characteristics that form this plurality (Watson, Varjas, Meyers & Graybill, 2010). It acknowledge the different sexual attractions beyond heterosexual binaries that requires male to be sexually interested to females and the inverse thereof (Bhana, 2014).

### Heteronormativity:

Heteronormativity is the process whereby heterosexuality is constructed as the norm and everything in contradiction with it is constructed as deviant (Msibi, 2012). Socially males and female opposite attraction which constructs heterosexuality is perceived and

privileged as the norm (LaSala, 2013).

### Heterosexism:

Simoni (1996) defines heterosexism as the belief that heterosexuality is the only natural and acceptable sexual orientation and the irrational hatred and discrimination directed at those deemed non-heterosexual.

### Sexual orientation:

Emotional and sexual attraction to another person or other people, who may be of the opposite gender, same gender, or another gender identity (UNESCO, 2015).

### Transgender or Trans:

An umbrella term to refer to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differ(s) from sex assigned to them at birth (UNESCO, 2015).

### Youth:

The United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 with all UN statistics based on this range (Furlong, 2013). South Africa's National Youth Commission Act, 1996 however defines youth as those from ages 14-35 years (Cramm, Nieboer, & Finkelflugel, 2013). This study mainly refers to school youth and makes references to the experiences of participating youth when they were at school.

## **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### 1.3.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The positive outcomes of parental involvement in schools towards optimal learning and healthy development of children as been confirmed in research (Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Richardson, 2008; Sauders & Shelton, 2009). Parental involvement with the schools of their children yielded improved academic achievement, sense of well-



being, attendance, p o s i t i v e learner attitudes, homework and educational aspirations (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005; Hill & Craft, 2003). International studies has also shown that when parents of children with diverse sexual orientations and learning institutions work together, experiences of homophobic bullying, violence as other forms of discrimination reduces significantly (Rothman, Keyes, & Boehmer, 2012; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2010, Sax, & Weintraub, 2014). A safe and inclusive social environment is particularly important for parents who embrace and affirm their children's non-heterosexual orientations (Matee, 2018; Brown, 2019). However, South African schools, a central ecology for children, are found to be compulsory heteronormative spaces with continued forms of discrimination, stigmatisation, and mistreatment of non-heterosexual identities that in turn threatens equal education opportunities for all learners (Brown & Diale, 2017; Francis, 2017; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Qaqamba, 2017). It is also well documented through emerging studies in South African schools that sexual minority youths are at higher risk for compromised school outcomes compared to their heterosexual counterparts due to discriminatory practices (Brown & Diale, 2017; Butler & Astbury, 2005; Francis, 2017; Kowen & Davis, 2006; Msibi, 2012; Wells & Polders, 2006). Oppression and homophobic violence based on non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity still permeate social interactions with peers and teachers, frame curricula through a heterosexual lens, perpetuate compulsory heteronormative school ethos and silence non-heterosexual identities to be hidden (Francis, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019).

In light of this poignant reality of school experiences for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and intersex school youth, it is not certain how schools and parents who embrace the sexual diversity of their children work in partnership to produce a safe, enabling and inclusive environment for learners with diverse sexual orientations. It is within this context that this study explores the experiences of parents who affirm their child's same-sex sexuality when engaging with schools.

### 1.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that a research question identifies the important factors that a study focus on.

The primary question of this study was:

*What are the school involvement experiences of parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their children towards safe and enabling learning environments?*

The secondary research questions that would further inform the primary question were the following:

- How do parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their children experience involvement in their child's school towards safe and enabling learning environments?
- What do parents of children with same-sex sexual orientations expect from schools to create a safe and inclusive learning environment?
- What are the needs of parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientations to establish an optimal home-school partnership towards safe and enabling learning environments?

### 1.3.3 THE AIMS OF THIS STUDY

- This study aimed at developing an understanding of home-school partnership as a key construct towards the inclusion of learners with same-sex sexual orientations in South African schools.
- The study aimed at identifying the challenges and opportunities that exist to facilitate effective school engagement with parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientations of their children.

### 1.3.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- The primary objective of this study was to explore the experiences of parents who affirm their children's same-sexual orientations when engaging with schools to address concerns towards safe and inclusive learning environments amidst reported homophobic violence and bullying.
- This study investigated parental expectations towards effective school engagement to facilitate a safe and inclusive learning environment for their children with same-sex sexual orientation.
- The study developed an understanding of parental needs to contribute towards to safe, inclusive and enabling learning environments for their children with same-sex sexual orientation.

### **1.4 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW**

The affirmation and protection of school youth with diverse gender and sexual orientations is mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (DoJ, 1996), the South African Schools Act (SASA), No. 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011). On 10 December 1996, President Nelson Mandela signed into effect South Africa's new Constitution, making South Africa the first country in the world to include a sexual orientation clause in its Bill of Rights (DoJ, 1996). As part of the transformation process the Department of Education (DOE) published the White Paper 2 on Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools (DOE, 1996), to foster democratic institutional management at school level (Mncube, 2009). These two landmark documents essentially enabled young people with same-sex sexual orientations to be affirmed within schools and be protected from any form of harm and discrimination. However, the country has been criticised for not being consistent in monitoring compliance with this legislation (DePalma & Francis, 2014). Besides the Constitution (DoJ, 1996) and the White Paper 2 (DOE, 1996), there are other educational policies and legislature in place to protect sexuality minority school youth. Examples of these are the South African

Council for Educators (SACE) (1997), the Prevention and Combatting of Hate Crimes Bill, (2018) the Protection for Harassment Act No 17 (DoJ, 2011) and the establishment of the School Governing Body (SGB) structure (DOE, 1996b). All of these regulatory policies and structures aims at rendering a safe and inclusive space for all children. The promotion parental involvement with schools is deemed as a significant approach to optimize efforts to support learners between the home and school ecologies. Amidst all these policies, legislature and interventions to address discrimination based on sexuality, this minority group of youth still experience heteronormative and heterosexist acts on a daily basis in South African schools (Francis, 2017; 2019; 2019a; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019, Msibi, 2012; Brown & Diale, 2017). The Protection from Harassment Act no 17 (DoJ, 2011) came into effect on 27th April 2013 to address harassment and stalking behaviours which violate constitutional provisions of right to privacy and dignity of individual persons. Yet, bullying based on non-heteronormative sexualities continue. All of these policies and legislations are discussed comprehensively in chapter 2.

From the literature it is apparent that the more expressive the youth are about their non-normative sexual orientations, the more likely they are to be victimised when societies' values contest with national policies (Francis, 2017; Msibi, 2012). For youth with same-sex sexual orientations, developing a positive identity specifically includes coming to terms with their sexual minority status (LaSala, 2013). Elsewhere, it is also reported that sexual minorities report higher rates of victimisation, hearing biased remarks on their sexual status, and feeling unsafe at school (Russel et al., 2010). In a study conducted in the U.S.A, D'Augelli, Pilkington and Hershberger (2002) found that 81% of same-sex sexual orientation youth reported that they have been verbally abused, 38% had been threatened with physical assault, 15% had been physically assaulted, 6% had been assaulted with a weapon, and 16% had been sexually assaulted.

Nixon's (2010) UK research results supports these findings and showed that youth with same-sex sexual orientations are not only bullied at schools, but also verbally harassed and even physically harmed in all efforts to uphold. In a recent neighboring Namibian study, it was found that high school boys who were bullied and being called gay had greater psychological distress and more negative attitudes about the school

climate (Brown, 2017). Social and political values influenced school responses to the inclusion of diverse sexual identities and gender expressions (Brown, 2019a). Comparative research between heterosexual and same-sex orientation youth showed that health risks were lowest for students who reported no teasing, but those who experienced homophobic torment reported the highest levels of depression and suicidal feelings (Espelage et al., 2008). Similarly, an Australian study showed that having a history of victimisation predicted emotional challenges in adolescence, specifically victimisation at age 13 was linked to depression and anxiety a year later (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin & Patton, 2001).

Within a largely heteronormative culture, including religion, values and morals, that allows privilege and enforces heterosexual feelings and relationships as the only acceptable expression of sexuality, the youth who experience same-sex sexual attractions may develop feelings of “othering” and even shame (Herek, 2004).

The notion of partnerships in educational situations is of particular importance in the relationship between family, the community and the school to enhance optimal development for children. The regulatory South African Council of Education (SACE) (1997) set out conduct guidelines for schools on how to engage with learners, parents and significant stakeholders to enhance mutual responsibility and respect for the education of all children. SACE (1997) stipulates that teachers should recognise parents as partners in education, and promote harmonious relationships with them. This body highlights the duty of teachers to keep parents adequately and timeously informed about the well-being and the progress of the children while in schools. Section 4 of SASA (DOE, 1996b) states that community participation should be realised as one of the guiding principles in education and interested parties must be involved in all aspects of the education system. The White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education calls on the active collaboration among all the role players in the educational process, namely teachers, principals, parents, youth and professional support personnel (DOE, 2001).

For many years, researchers and educators have been discussing whether and how schools are prepared to work with students' families, with the public and with organisations in the community (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). According to SASA (DOE,

1996b) schools have an obligation to involve parents in the learning environment and should be considered with aspects of school governance, teaching and learning. The belief is that when parents are involved effectively in their children's schooling, academic performance and agency improves (Jeynes, 2005). It is important to be aware that schools are microcosms of society (Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015) and often assume the value systems of their immediate community. In South Africa, parents expect that schools will respect the values of the parents and the community it is located in (Heystek, 1999). However, it is through parental involvement in the schools which their children attend that values and culture are accommodated in the school environment (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). They argue that the underlying principle for a home-school partnership is that family is the primary educating structure for children (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). However, parental involvement must not only be motivated by policies and legislation as mentioned, but by the mission to be part of the the holistic development of their children.

Among the essential characteristics of a home-school partnership are effective communication strategies, sharing of ideas, problem solving, and teamwork with parents, and community members (Achinstein, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Lawson, 2003). Schools and teachers should actively listen to parents, encourage their participation and distribute power which results to the optimal development of the children in their care (Apple, 1993; Bean & Apple, 1999). The domain of profession and laymen dichotomies creates tensions to how parents are perceived as significant contributors to the teaching and learning of children in this 'specialist' field. Parents on the other hand claim the status of rightful custodians of the youth and will direct the knowledge their children obtain in schools. While much of the contemporary literature on parental involvement in schools implies an undifferentiated parental voice, the reality of participation in schools are quite different. Despite the calls for expanding participation on moral or efficiency grounds, devolution of decision making to lower levels of the system may not necessarily extend to local participation to the disenfranchised and marginalised. Participatory decision making may exploit or empower people, stifle or stimulate organisational change, and reinforce or redefine the patterns of power and privilege in organisations, including schools (Malen, 1999).



This study was unable to locate any research conducted in the South African context exploring the perspective of parents who affirmed the same-sex sexuality of their child and their experiences with school involvement in order to foster inclusivity that could render their children with equal learning and well-being opportunities to their heterosexual peers. If parental involvement as mandated in SASA, SACE, White Paper 6 of Inclusive Education and NEPA then it is of critical importance to seek an understanding of how schools engage with parents whose children express diverse sexual orientations.

## **1.5 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDEPINNING THIS STUDY**

This section provides the theoretical framework that underpins this study. I have adopted Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory as the basis of this study in explaining the impact of the social influences of parents, the schools and the development of the non-heterosexual youth. The combination of parents, school experiences and achievement play a prime role in the socialisation of the same-sex sexual identity youth (Russel et al., 2010). It is of importance that although the framework is centred on youth with same-sex sexualities, it needs to be remembered that the immediate environment of the youth is his/her parents and school and how the other spheres or ecologies influence them in turn. The ecological layers of Bronfenbrenner's theory consist of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem. I briefly discussed the framework and the interdependence of each ecologies. A comprehensive discussion is presented in chapter 3.

The Bio-ecological System Theory suggests that parents and schools and their relationship with each other have a significant influence on the education and development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The Bio-ecological Systems Theory, as the name suggests, is a combination of ecological and systematic views (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2006). This implies that parents, school and the same-sex sexual orientation youth cannot exist in isolation and that they need the constant support of their environment. The success of any country's education system is dependent to a great extent on the mutual trust and collaboration existing between all partners (DOE, 1996b). Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory maintains that parental and

school influences are very important in bringing about change in the lives of (same-sex sexual orientation) children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The ecologies in which children navigate in South Africa has been proven to compulsory and violently heteronormative (The Other Foundation, 2016), thus providing a way to conceptualise integration and interaction between the youth, their parents and schools and to examine how this influences academic achievement as well as the psychosocial and identity development of the same-sex sexual youth.

Any change in one layer or ecology will have a cascading effect on the other layer. Children in the context of this study, learners, exists at the centre of Bronfenbrenner's model. They spend considerable time as they interact with the members of those diverse settings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For positive and sustainable developmental outcomes, the five layers of systems must be viewed and considered holistically when planning interventions for the identity development and positive well-being of youth with same-sex sexual orientations. The Bio-ecological System Theory reinforces the role of the family influence in bringing about change. For this study, I worked with parents who affirmed same-sex sexuality of their children taking in considerations the various other ecologies.

The youths' microsystem includes parents, teachers, school, religious institutions, peers and relatives. For the purpose of this study, the microsystem focused on the parents and school, but did not neglect the other agents. The parents and school is the closest, earliest, and often the most durable and influential microsystem (Senefeld & Perrin, 2014). According to Epstein (1995) most parents prefer direct involvement in their children's education and learning in particular. Hall and Engelbrecht (1999) reinforce the notion of parental involvement in their children's education that includes insight into their child's progress, particularly in decision-making and being critical of information on educational issues. Significant external structure depicts home and school dynamic contexts as influential variables that could influence the learning and development of youth depending on the increase or decrease of communication and collaboration (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The relationship between parents and schools



is complex and dynamic, especially in South Africa with diverse levels of literacy, class and economic differences and other forms of social dynamics that continue to impact heavily in much of the population Mncube, 2009).

The mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model provides the link or connection between the structures of the youth's microsystem. Two significant microsystems of the child is home and school where the individual is enhanced by the consistent and positive interactional relationships (Donald et al., 2006). Although the political and educational systems say no to discrimination against diverse sexual identities and gender expressions, research finds teachers and schools to still privilege dominant religious or cultural values that prohibits them from affirming homosexuality (Msibi, 2012; Bhana, 2014; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019).

The exosystem involves the larger social system in which the youth may not function directly but which impacts his or her development by overlapping or interacting with some structures in the microsystem. Beyond the school, youth are learning about and exposed to gender and sexual diversity from sensationalist and stereotypical accounts in the media and from popular culture. In the school, with the formal curriculum, students do not learn much that challenges these stereotypical misrepresentations. School youth hardly engage in affirming discussions about gender and sexual diversity, except pejoratively (Brown & Diale, 2017). Consequently, young people learn that it is acceptable to vilify non-heteronormative identities (Brown, 2018).

The outer layer of the Bio-ecological systems model, the macrosystem, represents the larger culture, values and norms in which microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems are embedded. Due to the highly perpetuated dissonant homosexual cultural views (The Other Foundation, 2016), parents of same-sex sexual orientation youth are likely to face resistance towards inclusive learning environments for. The macrosystem also deals with sociocultural values, norms, belief systems, and gender roles (Donald et al., 2006). The intolerance and injustice towards people of same-sex sexuality is motivated by the socio-cultural value system that is still strongly upheld in many societies are found to overflow into the school environment (Bhana, 2013; Mayeza &

Vincent, 2019). In addition, tradition and culture play a very crucial role in reactions to people's sexual orientation (Reygan & Lynette, 2014). For this reason, the Bio-ecological system theory is ideal to lens this study.

The chronosystem relates to the environmental events and transitions that occur throughout the child's life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). It includes the historical events that happen through the development of the child. LaSala (2013) explains that young people who continuously experienced childhood homosexuality are likely to grow up as depressed adults. The level of support from significant people in the lives of queer identities influences the engagement with the broader society (Fields, 2001). The daily experiences of the childhood and adolescent span for LGBT school youth is thus critical for their human agency and navigation.

## **1.6 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

The chapter layout to be structured is as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the research topic and contextualise this study. This chapter outlines the incentive for this study and provides rationale and significance of the study. This chapter also presents the problem statement, aims and objectives, the primary and sub-research questions that underpins the study. The second half of the chapter briefly engage with the theoretical framework as well as the methodological considerations.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed literature review that reflects the lives of same-sex sexual orientation school youth both in South Africa as well as internationally. It also examines the experiences the parents of same-sex sexual orientation youth and parental involvement in schools. This chapter draws significant attention to the educational policies and legislations that provides enabling school climates for diverse learner identities.

Chapter 3 presents Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological model as a theoretical framework in relation to sexual diversity in the social and school context of South Africa

Chapter 4 details the research methodology considered in this study. I provided a

rationale of the methodology opted for and explain the decisions regarding sample and sampling, data gathering strategies, data analysis and ethical considerations.

In chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis of the study with the individual semi-structured interviews being the source of data. I also present the analysis of the data collected. This chapter relates the findings to the literature that was detailed in chapter two and recent research developments.

Chapter 6 I summarise the study and contains the conceptual framework, discussion of my findings, limitations and future directions. It also includes the recommendations and reflections.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I provided the background and the rationale for the study. I also stated the objective and my three critical questions that guided my study. The value of the research as well as the layout of the chapters were outlined. Chapter 2 presents an overview of past and present research on school experiences of youth with same-sex sexual orientations, parental involvement and policy approaches that guide parental involvement and sexual diversity in schools.

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## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focusses on the review literature that discuss the dynamics of sexual diversity from a South African as well as global school perspectives. The discussions also engage with literature on the experiences of parents who affirms the same-sex sexual orientation of their child. A significant portion of this chapter is dedicated to discussions of policy and legislation that requires the affirmation and protection of sexual diversity as well as school related policy guides. All of these discussions is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current realities of school youth and sexual diversity and the significance of parental involvement.

This chapter commence with the South African constitutional reference, Article 9(3) (DOJ, 1996) which declares that:

*No person shall be unfairly discriminated against on the ground of race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, conscience belief, culture, language, birth, or marital status.*

The South African Constitution and its Bill of Rights among other identities affirms sexual orientation and gender and protects it from any discrimination, thereby providing a national imperative for the respect of related human rights (DOJ, 1996). The unfortunate reality in South Africa is that traditional binaries of male and female sexuality expressions are intensely influenced by heterosexual norms and patriarchal values (Francis, 2019). The history of same-sex sexual orientation people in South Africa, as in the rest of the world, is a history of oppression and resistance (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Msibi, 2011). There has been a focus on the high levels of violence against these non-heterosexual identities marked by rape and murder of lesbian woman and gay men (Anguita, 2012; Brown, 2012; Msibi, 2011). Despite the protection and legal equality of people with same-sex sexual orientations, the social reality is quite different for people with same-sex sexual orientations as many of them are harassed, subjected to violence and face discrimination from kinship and institutional service providers (The Other Foundation, 2016). This is indicative of the reality that deep-seated

repressive remnants from the history of South Africa does not instantly undo oppression through policy and legislation. Intensive educational efforts will have to be explored to bring about an understanding of diversity and sexuality in the South African context (Bhana, 2014).

Rothmann and Simmonds (2015) explain that the schooling system as a microcosm of its community presents equally repressive values and practices towards non-heteronormative sexual orientations. This is despite the South African Schools Act (SASA) (DOE, 1996b) which guarantees equality and advances principles of democratic transformation. The SASA (DOE, 1996b) requires from schools to actively combat racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination and uphold the rights of all youth, parents, and educators. Additionally the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) is guided by principles of respect, justice, equality and dignity. These legislative guides prohibits children from any form of harm and discrimination regardless of the environment they may find themselves. The unfortunate reality is that schools are reduced to spaces of cognitive learning and teaching only and discussion about sexuality remains silenced (Bhana; 2012; Francis, 2017; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Subsequently schools remain unsafe and discriminatory environments for learners with same-sex sexual orientations where they continuously face violence, vilification and isolation (Francis, 2013; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Msibi, 2012; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019).

Among the key adults in children's life across their span of development are the parents (Bhana, 2013). Initial anticipations for most parents is that their children will express a heterosexual identity (Fields, 2001). The manner in which parents respond to their child's non-normative sexual orientation or gender expression profoundly affects the development and well-being of their children (McConnell, Birkett & Mustnaski, 2016). Bouris, Guilamo-Ramos, Pickard, Shiu, Loosier, Dittus, Gloppen and Waldmiller (2010) presented evidence that shows parental acceptance of children with non-heterosexual identities can serve as an important protective factor for the individual child. Youth in South Africa who experienced the affirmation from family experienced high levels of confidence and self-esteem (Brown, 2019). LaSala, (2013) reported that lesbian and gay youth with family support were less likely to engage in destructive behaviours such

as substance abuse and unprotected sexual activities. The inverse however has proven to be detrimental (Elizur & Ziv, 2001). Lesbian and gay youth without family support showed higher rates of depression as well as alcohol and drug abuse compared to their heterosexual peers (Ryan & Gruskin, 2006). The treatment of lesbian and gay people and their families is complicated (LaSala, 2013). Many lesbian identities have been evicted from the domestic space due to family disapproval of their sexual orientation (Brown, 2012). These experiences are more prevalent where parents become angry, disappointed and withdrawn after they learned of the same-sex sexual orientation of their children (Cohen et al., 2006). A South Africa a survey with 5 000 participants revealed that families who discovered the same-sex sexual orientations of a relative would disown them and inflict harm (The Other Foundation, 2016). More effort is required to address challenges that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people experience within the family space. The advent of constitutional recognition and protection of sexual diversity in South Africa made LGBTIQ identities visible, growing and accepting in certain corners of society (Msibi & Rudwick, 2015). Some South African parents have been found to embrace the sexual diversity of their children (Matee, 2018; Brown, 2019). The reviewed literature shows a gap on school involvement of parents who affirm and embrace the same-sex sexual orientation of their children. This is particularly critical considering the foregrounded literature that present schools as unsafe for diverse sexual orientations. Earlier I pointed to research that confirms the benefits of parental affirmation to their children with same-sex sexual orientations. It is uncertain how parents who affirm the same-sexual orientation of their children engage with schools who are likely to be repressed and isolated due to sexual diversity. The South African education system will have to consider all voices to ensure that the diverse learner population are rendered with quality education.

## **2.2 THE LIVES OF THE SAME-SEXUAL ORIENTATION YOUTH**

The experience of school youth with same-sex sexual orientations has been grossly neglected in multi-disciplinary adolescent research and service provision in South Africa (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Emerging research explain the organising patterns of

thinking and ideologies of dominant heteronormative practices that ultimately results in discrimination (Msibi, 2012; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Francis, 2013; Francis, 2017; Bhana, 2012). Heteronormativity and heterosexism denotes the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic and ordinary phenomenon and is premised on a natural binary division of the sexes and the privileging of the dominant heterosexual orientation while all others are frowned upon and discriminated against (Foucault, 1979). Heteronormativity and heterosexism can be explicit, including homophobic name-calling or verbal and physical harassment of students who deviate from what is perceived to be the norm (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2013; Msibi, 2012).

Victimisation is common in the lives of same-sex sexual orientation school youth (Ryan & Gruskin, 2006) and is often based on students' non-conformity to gender norms (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Msibi, 2011). Denoting emotional and physical violence in the South African context (Msibi, 2012). The constant harassment of school youth with same-sex sexual orientations in and around their learning institutions sends a powerful message that who they are is unacceptable and need to hide and be silent in order to protect themselves from the repression (Francis, 2019). One devastating consequence is that one third of all suicides in the United States are committed by individuals who identify themselves as gay or lesbian (Halady, 2013; Rivers, 2004; Russel et al., 2011). The social, behavioural, and health effects of stigma affect lesbians, gay men and bisexuals (LGB) throughout their life course (Ryan & Gruskin, 2006). Very little information is available in South Africa on the relationship between suicidality and LGBTQ youth but as recent as 2018 a learner at a Durban school committed suicide after a teacher referred to his hairstyle as gay (Lutchman, 2018). This signals the intense wellbeing challenges that school youth with same-sex sexualities have to endure as they navigate the school space.

In South Africa, approximately 10% of school youth identify with same-sex attraction who discover their attraction around puberty (Francis, 2012). The disclosure of same-sex sexual orientations within the South African home environment is often met with hostile reactions in the form of discrimination, rejection and isolation (Brown, 2019;



Francis & Reygan, 2016; The Other Foundation, 2016) leaving teachers as the most reliable agents of support. However, teachers are equally found to be dissonant to same-sex sexual orientations citing religious values and traditional cultural values to police hegemonic identities (Francis, 2017). Individuals who associate to conservative religious institutions express higher levels of heteronormativity and exhibiting more homophobia (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2012). Religious institutions and the secular movement have long been known not to agree on sexuality matters particularly on sexual abstinence, sex before marriage, extra-marital sex, contraceptive use and homosexuality (Mantell, Correale & Adams-Skinnera, 2010). Bhana in 2014 found that that major contributing factors towards teacher stigma and prejudice towards same-sexual orientation emanated from conservative religious values as well as archaic cultural view and this reality has not change to date (Mayeza & Vincent in 2019). Cultural discourses that gender and sexual diversity is un-African and a product of the Western world fuels the acts of shaming, bigotry and vilification towards individuals with same-sex sexual orientations (Sigamoney & Epprecht, 2013).

Hostility from teachers towards school youth with same-sex sexual orientations are found to be the cause of higher levels of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicide ideation (Brown, 2017; Savin-William, 2001). Such experiences are harmful to the optimal learning and development (Butler, Alpaslan, Strumpher & Astbury, 2003). While it is encouraging to notice increasing patterns of acceptance towards sexual diversity in South Africa (Msibi & Rudwick, 2015), literature points to the intensive transformation required in the various ecologies of the South African society to facilitate social cohesion for all gender and sexual identities. For the school environment this call is more hard pressing and urgent if all learners are to be rendered an equal and equitable learning environment.

### **2.3 DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**

South Africa has been hailed as a country with the most progressive legislative and policy frameworks to redress inequality, discrimination and oppression (Muthukrishna,



2008). The history of policy development in South Africa was marked with non-inclusive apartheid policies which focused largely on the social differences of individuals rather than on encouraging the acceptance of diversity and promoting harmonious co-existence (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Netshandama, 2013). In post-Apartheid South Africa, gender and sexual diversity education is mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (DoJ, 1996), the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (DOE, 1996b), and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011). Considering this human rights-based legislation that promotes a philosophy of redress and equality (Kraak & Young, 2001), this section examines how the different policy instruments propel an inclusive, safe and enabling learning environment for learners with diverse sexual orientations in schools. This discussion is deemed critical in this study because educators in South African schools to date still perceive the teaching of gender and sexual diversity curriculum as a cultural and moral dilemma (Francis, 2019; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019).

The most prominent guiding documents, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, protects the fundamental rights of every citizen.

*“The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”*  
(DOJ, 1996, p.19).

Bray (2005) purports that constitutional changes in South Africa necessitated a transformation of the education system to ensure that the multiple identities are affirmed, inclusively represented and that their rights are upheld. For example, The School Code of Conduct commits to: “...*treat **everyone** with respect regardless of differences in culture, religion, ability, race, gender, age, sexual orientation or social class...*” (DOE, 2008, p. 20). This study holds the position that all stakeholders, be it learners, teachers or parents qualify for respectful treatment and consideration. The significance of this document is that it make specific reference to the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity. This illustrates that teachers who are guilty of discriminatory practices towards

school youth with same-sex sexual orientations are in contravention of their conduct obligations.

One of the most central and overarching documents in the South African education system to facilitate the constitutional imperatives in and around the classroom is the South African Schools Act (SASA) (DOE, 1996b) that requires from:

*...this country a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State; and the SA Schools Act"* (DOE, 1996b, p. 1).

The South African School Act (SASA) (DOE, 1996b) acknowledges the rights of all learners, parents and educators to promote their acceptance and responsibilities towards diversity in the school environment. Among others, it also mandates a combat against sexism. Although it does not express the dynamics of sexual orientation overtly, the encompassing prohibition of discrimination in general should consider oppressive acts against identities with diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions. The inverse could be that the silence of sexual diversity in this seminal document is what causes teachers' lack of commitment to address aspects of sexual diversity. Since SASA (DOE, 1996b) makes provision for parental involvement, parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their children are entitled to engage with schools to facilitate a safe and inclusive learning environments. It is however not clear how much attention schools would render to such parents who might be in the minority.

Not only is parental involvement key in this study, but parents are central stakeholders in the education of children and for this reason it is important to clarify the concept parent from a policy perspective. The South African School Act (DOE 1996b, Section 16, p. B-4) defines a parent as:

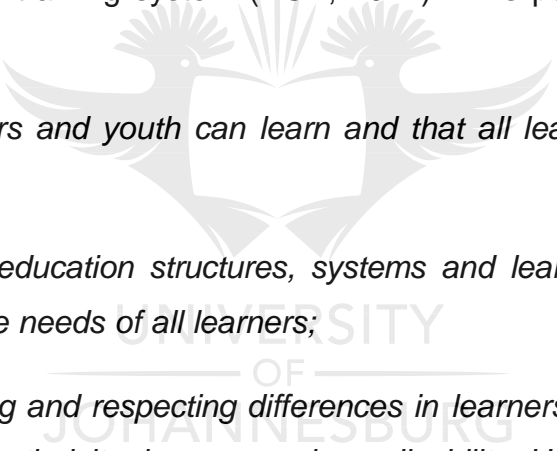
- a) *The parent or guardian of a learner*
- b) *The person legally entitled to custody of a learner or*
- c) *The person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs a) and b) towards the learner's education at school.*

The South African Schools Act 84, of 1996 (DOE, 1996b) accorded parents involvement in making decisions at schools to aid optimal learning and development.

SASA (DOE, 1996b) makes provision that all public schools in South Africa instate a democratically elected School Governing Body (SGB) that comprise of parents, learners, educators, non-teaching staff and the school principal (DOE, 1996b, p. B-11). The understanding is that these various entities would represent the voices of their constituents. Parents on the SGB will represent the voice of the various parent population, as is the case for learners and teachers. The (SGB) is a statutory body and derives all its powers and functions from the SASA (DOE, 1996). The SGB is responsible for the governance of the school with one of its core functions “promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school” (DOE, 1996, p. B-12). I would like to draw attention to the foregrounding literature that showed how the quality of education of learners with same-sex identities have been compromised due to unresponsive schools to issues of sexual diversity. The SASA of 1996 clearly obligates schools to ensure that all learners are rendered quality education. Yet again we notice how the rights to education of learners with same-sex sexual orientations has been compromised. However, parents who have children with same-sex sexual orientations

have a representative voice in the SGB. Theron, Liebenberg and Malindi (2014) holds the view that parents have a duty to uphold and protect the fundamental human rights of their children in the SGB. The concern is if these parent voices are in the minority because they do not align with dominant society values, it is uncertain whether they will be granted the necessary acknowledgement. A third of the nearly 800 000 queer identities in South Africa reported to have been subjected to violence, rejection from families and discrimination by key service providers (Institute of Race Relations, 2017). It raises the concern that if sexual minorities are still faced with social reprisal, how will their concerns be acknowledged. This question directly concerns parents who affirm their children's non-heterosexual identities considering the reported dissonance of LGBT identities in schools.

A further commitment of South Africa to deliver a dignified learning environment for all children was through the development of White Paper 6 that aimed at building an inclusive education and training system (DOE, 2011). This policy guideline signifies that :

- 
- (i) that all learners and youth can learn and that all learners and youth need support;*
  - (ii) enabling the education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners;*
  - (iii) acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infections;*
  - (iv) [that learning is] broader than formal schooling and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal settings and structures;***
  - (v) changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and environment to meet the needs of all learners; and*

(vi) *maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimizing the barriers to learning.*

The above extract in no uncertainty requires that schools should ensure that all learners are catered for and any form of obstacle to their learning should be removed. Foregrounding literature illustrated the danger of homophobic learning environments to optimal learning and holistic development. The principles of Inclusive education is wrapped in basic human rights that mandates quality education that enables prime human agency. Porteus (2008, p.13) defines human agency as the thoughts and actions people take individually and collectively change their worlds to navigate better lives and a better world. Inclusive education in South Africa requires a collective responsibility to all identities to ensure optimum developing opportunities for all. The universality to the underlying principles of inclusive education that advocates for quality education for all, is thus clear (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel & Malinena, 2012). The White Paper 6 on Inclusive education is in direct response to the constitutionally enshrined imperatives of dignity and protection of diverse identities. It states “*the principles guiding the broad strategies to achieve this vision [inclusive of] acceptance of principles and values contained in the Constitution*” (DOE, 2011, p. 5). Although White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education does not specifically makes reference to sexual orientation, the mere fact that the policy uphold constitutional values is sufficient to expect that schools will consider the inclusion of diverse sexual orientations. Muthukrishna (2008) argues that inclusion of education should go beyond the focus of disability and special education issues and are be located alongside all forms of oppression within a human rights framework. The implications of silence on sexual diversity in the White Paper 6 policy on Inclusive Education is yet to be measured.

The White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education however acknowledge the involvement of parents as a key stakeholder. This policy argues that “*the non-recognition and non-involvement of parents*” (DOE, 2001, p. 7) has the potential to cause barriers to learning. It requires from schools to “acknowledge the central role played by educators, and parents” (DOE, 2001, p. 7) to strengthen learning opportunities for all learners. This

document too creates a platform through which parents who have children with same-sex sexual orientations could consult with school authorities and educators.

Another policy to amplify SASA of 1996 (DOE, 1996b) statutory was the endorsement of the South African Council for Educators (SACE) (1997). The SACE is a body that oversees the implementation of the code of ethics of the various stakeholders in the South African schooling system. It has clear guidelines on educators' engagement with learners and parents.

The SACE Code of Conduct necessitates from educator to:

- Recognises the parents as partners in education, and promotes a harmonious relationship with them;
- Refrains from offering a bribe in any form to parents; and
- Do what is practically possible to keep parents adequately and timeously informed about the well-being and progress of the learner.

In addition, the Code of conduct between the educator and the community expects teachers to:

- Recognise that an educational institution serves the community, and therefore acknowledges that there will be differing customs, codes and beliefs in the community; and
- Conducts him/herself in a manner that does not show disrespect to the values, customs and norms of the community.

The significance of parental involvement is repeatedly underscored in the various education policies in South Africa. It underscores the shared responsibilities and overlapping influence between parents and educators towards the optimal opportunities in children's education (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) argues that investigations into parent involvement in diverse South African communities from the perspectives of educators, parents and youth confirm the need for a broader conceptualisation of parent involvement, which includes, by transcends, parental

participation in school governance. After all, Lemmer (2007) also notes that changes in governance arrangements alone do not improve adequate parental involvement and subsequent learner achievement. Empirical evidence reveals an important link between parental involvement and the quality of the partnership fostered (Ranson, Martin & Vincent, 2004; Symeou, 2007). Discussions on school responses to sexual diversity emerged strongly from 2010 onwards despite its mentioning in the South African constitution. Considering the still prevalent social dissonance to diverse sexual orientation and gender expressions in South Africa (The Other Foundation, 2016; Institute of Race Relations, 2017), it is not surprising that policy developers have not taken cognizance of sexual diversity within the discourse of learning and development. Kraak and Young (2001) hold the view that when the new government developed policies, the space was dominated by a few intellectuals who had inadequate experience of government, thereby creating the current disjuncture in ideology and practice.

As with the South African Constitution and SASA, The post-1994 curricula have always been used with the intention of facilitate unity and promoting social cohesion. Inconsistency of this curriculum to positively consider sexual and gender diversity (DePalma & Francis, 2014) an inadequately equipped teacher cohorts are largely responsible for the neglect of school youth with same-sex sexual orientations (Francis, 2017; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Rothman & Simmonds, 2015). The learning area of life skills orientation is intended to promote social justice, human rights, and inclusiveness as well as a healthy living environment (DOE, 2003, p. 5). Nevertheless, some learners are still excluded on the basis of their sexual orientation, curtailing any prospect of them realizing their full potential due to the level of discrimination in schools (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is based on the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), with the aim of instilling values that aspire to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Improve the quality of life and free the potential of all citizens;



- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society, in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law, and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

The education system and the curriculum have an important role to play in promoting unity in the country. However, these objectives are not guided by specific actions with envisaged clear outcomes and are, therefore, open to interpretation. The content in the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum has serious implications for the lives of learners, since content guidance, life skills education, health promotion, physical development and movement, environmental education, citizenship and human rights education, religion education, sex, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS are also included in the same curriculum (Francis, 2010; DePalma & Francis, 2014). However, the subject LO has not received the necessary support required for such a multi-specialised field of study (Francis & DePalma, 2014). As such, the educators often tasked with providing the Life Orientation curriculum are not trained to deliver content such as sexuality education (Ibid). This has a negative effect on the task of delivering education on gender and sexual diversity. The LO curriculum has been developed to correct the injustices of the past and ensure that children know about the history of South Africa and that the oppressive history is not repeated (DOE, 2011). Although the CAPS's aims are commendable, the foregrounding literature illustrated that the principles are not delivered in the classrooms.

## **2.4 SCHOOL: A DANGEROUS SPACE FOR GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY**

Francis (2017) found that schools are often seen as places for learning and teaching and not sexual identity spaces, and therefore discussions about sexuality in general remain silenced. This is in direct conflict with the aims of the LO Curriculum. The impetus for educational transformation in South Africa was the 1996 South African Schools Act (DOE, 1996b). However, despite the law being on the statute books, much remains the same within the schools themselves, where traditionally hegemonic values in school



governance and pedagogy remain rigid (Deacon et al., 1999; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Francis (2019a) argues that South African schools are critical social contexts in which dominant beliefs about sexuality are played out and social institutions which often mirror the larger structure of society, including the norms and behaviours of 'acceptable' sexuality. Because of the central role schools and peers play in the lives of developing youths, it is imperative to understand schools as normative contexts that shape the youth's well-being (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2012). Pejorative references such as fag, dyke, queer, lezzie, and homo has been normalised, and those terms often goes unchallenged by educators in ways that similar terms against other groups of students would never be tolerated (Morrow, 2006). Msibi (2012) reported that school youth with same-sex sexual orientations have negative experiences of schooling, which ranges from punitive actions in derogative language to vicious hate and forms of violence. This emphasises the importance of developing an understanding of what contributes towards a hostile school environment, heterosexism, heteronormativity and their negative effect on both the psychological and educational well-being of this minority group of youth. Schools and classrooms are spaces where compulsory heteronormativity and gender normative behaviours are perpetuated and even reproduced (Msibi, 2012). As mentioned before, despite lesbian and gay school youth disclosing their sexual orientation at a younger age, schools have not responded accordingly, leaving many young people isolated and at risk of violence and harassment (Holmes & Cahill, 2003). Bhana (2014) argues that academic studies are not enough. She calls for evidence-based and targeted interventions for schools but also to offer recommendations for tackling discriminatory practices and repressive attitudes. The benefit of identifying as heterosexual (or acting your given gender role), the majority school population has cultural and social support from both within and from outside of school. The lack of supporting mechanisms for school youth with same-sex sexual orientation not only produces an oppressive environment but encourages school to create meaning around homosexuality based on dominant notions of "natural" (Brown & Diale, 2017).

The mainstream South African society largely continues to accept and privilege heteronormativity (Institute of Race Relations), and school cultures mirror this paradigm,

creating a climate of hatred and oppression within their walls (Francis, 2019a). Schools have the potential to be powerful sites of social transformation and can play a crucial role in cementing democratic ideals and combatting prejudice provided they consider all the stakeholders and this would include parents (Bhana, 2013; 2014). South Africa is one of the most progressive African countries in terms of recognition of sexual diversity rights yet it is purely idealistic when studying the lives of the non-heterosexual youth (Awondo, Geschiere & Reid, 2012). It is becoming clear that educators need to know more about how to communicate effectively, share ideas, solve problems, and work together as members of teams with other educators, parents and community members as what the aim was with the establishment of the SASA, the SGB, SACE and NEPA. In order to disrupt a heteronormative and heterosexist climate, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) recommended identifying five key areas of change within the school culture to address these structures and practices: 1) language, 2) safe zones, 3) comprehensive bullying policies and laws, 4) inclusive curriculum, and 5) and partnership with key stakeholders. These are necessary action steps schools need to adopt to disrupt heteronormativity and heterosexism, thereby building tolerance and changing the culture of the school as well as working for key agencies to support a healthy learning environment. With tolerance education, children learn about respect, diversity, and the differences of others in society (Kumashiro, 2002).

This is evident in the lack of policies, implantation of existing ones and the monitoring thereof is critical to the promotion of the rights of gender and sexually diverse individuals, which includes youth, educators, parents and the school.

## **2.5 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

The manner in which parents respond to their child's homosexuality or gender identity - be it real or a perceived reaction - profoundly affects the development and well-being of their children. The degree to which parents respond positively to their child's homosexuality vary widely (Elizur & Ziv, 2001; McConnell, Birkett, & Mustanski, 2017; Saltzburg, 2004). Empirical evidence shows that parental acceptance can serve as an important protective factor for same-sex youth (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Brown, 2019). Like family relationships themselves, the history and treatment of lesbian and gay people

and their families is complicated (LaSala, 2013).

Mncube (2009), highlights the attention that parental involvement in education has been receiving and offers Epstein's model of parental involvement which he uses to reinforce the idea that communication within the education system should take place between the home and school, reflecting the need for corporation between families and schools. Lemmer (2000) found that the Epstein typology of parent involvement works well within the South African context. The challenge though is the lack of research conducted based on the effects of such a home-school partnership on the lives of school youth with same-sex sexual orientations. It is assumed that in most societies parents will prepare their children for the learning environment and good conduct in schools (Epstein et al., 2002). Comer (2004) and Edwards (2004) contend that parental involvement programmes must be targeted to local needs that render school youth functional in their environments. Gorman-Murray (2008) explained that there are parents who accepts their child's non-heterosexual orientation and, therefore need guidance in supporting their children (Matee, 2018). Among the many tenets of the wave of educational reform efforts in the last thirty years is the idea that parental involvement is an essential element in children's academic achievement and social development (Comer, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Smrekar & Cohan-Vogal, 2001).

The more welcome parents feel at school and the easier the school makes it for them to be involved, the more likely the parents are to be actively involved with their children's education (DOE, 2016). Whether parents perceive themselves to be invited to become active participants in the educational process has a major influence on their decisions. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) agrees parental involvement is largely influenced by the enabling climate created by schools. Research has suggested that the extent of parental involvement depends, among other things, on how frequently the school approaches parents and the reason for contact (Epstein, 2001). The reasons why school contact parents tend to determine the climate parental (Mantell et al., 2010). Conventional wisdom embraces the belief that parents are the most important mentors and educators in a child's life (Smrekar & Cohan-Vogal, 2001).

The history and philosophy of parental involvement is supported by Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological theory that stresses the importance of relationships and the interconnections of environments where children grow and learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Epstein, 2001). However, regardless of the parental involvement and acceptance, schools remain unsafe spaces for same-sex orientation youth and parental involvement could contribute significantly to change that poignant reality.

## **2.6 HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS**

Researchers recognise the important role a strong positive bond between parents and schools play in the development and education of children (Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Richardson, 2008; Sauders & Shelton, 2009). In South Africa, most parents do not know much about the programmes and opportunities that are available in their children's schools, and the educators not familiar with most parents' goals and aspirations for their children (Richardson, 2008). Thus, educators, parents, and the youth have little understanding of each other's interests in schools (Sauders & Shelton, 2009). Surveys confirm that if schools invest in practices to involve families, then parents respond by conducting those practices (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Adams, Forsyth and Mitchell (2009) explains that involved parents as those who actively share in the responsibility for students and school performance by working in synchrony with educators, administrators, and other parents to shape and reinforce an educational vision that fosters student learning and growth.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) advises that socialisation and education should be organised so that, over time, the balance of power is given to the developing person which in this case being the same-sex sexual orientations school youth. It is essential to understand home, school and community connections in order to understand the organisation and improvement of schools, the influence of families and communities on children, and the academic and developmental progress or problems of students (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

The need to equip educators as well as their parents to design relevant home/school initiatives is also an important professional development priority. In South Africa there

are still much to be learned about home-school partnerships and the schools' response to the diversity evident within students' homes and communities. Research findings suggest that parents' attitudes, along with their behaviour and activities with regard to their children's education, do affect academic achievement in a positive way (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004). There appears to be a general agreement about the effects the family can have by being involved with their children's education. In addition, Henderson and Berla (1994) claim that parental involvement in their children's education affects their school attendance, more students graduate, and behaviour of students' improves. According to Epstein (2001), evidence suggests that most parents want their children to succeed in school and in order for them to be good partners in their children's education, they yearn to obtain more information from schools to effectively collaborate. Parental involvement in education has been a topic of interest for many years among those who are concerned with improving academic achievement for children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Sanders and Sheldon (2009) maintain that schools become successful when a strong and positive relationship among students, parents, educators and the community has been established. The benefit for youth with a strong relationship between schools and homes is based on the development of trust between parents and educators leading to a positive outcome for same-sex sexual orientation youth. Gutman and McLoyd (2000) carried out research with the aim of ascertaining the parental behaviour of typical successful students and comparing them with students who were encountering behavioural and academic problems. Epstein (2001) alleges that there are many reasons for developing and establishing a partnership between school, family and community. The main reason for such a partnership is to aid students in succeeding at school in all domains. Other reasons are, for example, to improve school climate and school programs, to advance parental skills and leadership, to assist families to connect with others in the school and the community, as well as to assist educators with their work. All these reasons emphasise the importance for parents to play an active role in their children's education and to keep a strong and positive relationship with schools.

Clarke (2016) asserts that schools function best when parents and the community

are active participants and have a sense of ownership of the school. It is understood that schools need more involvement from parents since the chief benefits on their children's education are higher grades, positive behaviour and attitude and more effective schools (Richardson, 2008). These home-based activities include, among others, monitoring their child's school work and progress, discussing school related issues with their child, and assisting with homework. Students generally feel that when parents help, they do better at school.

In spite of much research on what affects parental involvement has on academic achievement, Epstein and Sanders (2006) claim that many educators and administrators still see themselves as individual leaders of their classrooms and schools. Thus, little attention is paid to partnerships and collaborations with parents. In order to enhance educational achievement of students, educators need to scrutinise possibilities to develop and form partnerships with parents (Richardson, 2008). Such a partnership is, especially in secondary schools, where parents often lack the confidence in their ability to assist their children with the curriculum (Sheldon, 2009). It depends largely on the school whether parents decide to participate in their child's education or not (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Thus, the school is instrumental in establishing a connection with families and in forming such a partnership. Studies suggest that whether connections are formed, and sustained among schools, families and communities, is influenced by the quality of the relationship (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Understanding the connections among families, schools and other contexts in which children grow and develop is more important than apportioning responsibility for achievement. Current educational thoughts and research views these influences as interdependent and we strive to inform our practices with the study of the interactions of biological and environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Comer, 2004; Epstein, 2001). Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological systems theory has been utilized for decades in the development of educational and social services. Sociologists' attention to schools, families, and communities has changed dramatically over the past half century. The simultaneous influence on children of schools, families, and communities is undeniable, but too



often the connections across contexts are ignored in theory, research, policy and practice (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). As mentioned earlier, there is confliction in policy and practice in the South African context with regards to educational structures. Studies that have measured the effect of close parental relationships and support on children's educational attainment (Lee & Bowen, 2006) have noted that statistically, such children usually obtain very high scores in the area of psychosocial and behavioural competence. Literature also suggests that most parents believe when they are involved early on in the education of their children then they are better equipped to put their children on the right path (Olatoye & Ogunkola, 2008). Research findings have identified certain aspects of parental behaviour as important indicators of lower levels of truancy among students (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). These include monitoring student's whereabouts, discussions with their children about school, volunteering at school and being members of a parent-teacher association. Children's behaviour, both in school and out, is closely related to the family dynamics and their home environment. Parental involvement is also important for students' social and emotional development (Sauders & Shelton, 2009). Students who have parents that are involved in their education have been shown to have a higher motivation to achieve in school and a higher level of school engagement.

## **2.7 TEACHING AND LEARNING OF GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY**

Schools are not merely sites for the learning of academic subjects but also places where young people and their teachers do a great deal of work on the construction of their identities in a whole range of ways, notably, around issues of sexuality which is intimately connected with struggles around gender (Francis, 2017). However, the literature outlines the lack of gender and sexual diversity curriculum content in South African schools. Researchers, in South Africa, addressing mainly homophobia and schooling show how curriculum policies (Thani, 2016), teaching and learning material (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2018) pedagogy (Francis, 2017), classroom norms, routines and practices and what teachers say and do legitimate heterosexuality and heteronormativity in schools. Potgieter and Reygan (2012) examined selected Life Orientation (LO) textbooks for grades 7 to 12 and

found that the representation of sexual minorities in these textbooks does not realise the commitment and spirit of the South African constitution. This is attributed to the lack of clear policy guidelines and, in many instances, to the misinterpretation and misalignment of existing policy. This lack of policy guidelines continues to deprive youth of their rights as citizens of this country who are afforded all freedoms by the Constitution (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). The lack of teaching and learning of gender and sexual diversity content in school has negative implications for youth and society at large, because the mandate to be inclusive of diversity remains unchanged, regardless of the prevailing systemic and personal challenges experienced by educators in teaching the content (Francis, 2012). This mandate is stated in the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (DOE, 1996b) preamble where it is noted that South Africa should also provide an education of progressively high quality for all youth and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance.

Sexual and gender diversity intolerance can be attributed to the country's non-inclusive apartheid policies, with the focus more on the social differences of individuals rather than on encouraging the acceptance of diversity and promoting harmonious co-existence (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Netshandama, 2013). Butler and Astbury (2008) highlight how schools provide openly homophobic role-modelling. This inconsistency in the law and in practice is largely due to what DePalma & Francis (2014) attribute to the educators' inability to draw guidance from legislation as well as to the conflicting discourses that exist between legislation and the education policy. The policies are often vague and not sufficiently prescriptive. When correctly understood and executed, the LO curriculum is a powerful medium to educate about social justice. However, the successful teaching of LO in the classroom is often dependent on the educator who may or may not have the training (Pieterse, 2019; Rothman & Simmonds, 2015). This may even further promote intolerance, as is often observed with the teaching of gender and sexual diversity (Francis, 2012). As such, while the teaching of social justice is outlined in the CAPS, educators need to be better trained to deliver the curriculum



content, which should be effectively monitored by subject advisors (Richardson, 2008). Inclusion of gender and sexual diversity content into the curriculum and teaching could also be an opportunity to influence the collegiate environment for this minority youth (Brown & Diale, 2017). Inclusive content and teaching sends a clear message to non-heterosexual youth that their existence, experience and presence are valued

## **2.8 CONCLUSION**

In light of the above findings, it is evident that lack of implementation and poor monitoring of the ideals the South African Constitution and specifically the South African Schools Act (SASA), No. 84 of 1996 (DOE, 1996b) is failing to protect and support the sexual minority school youth. It further fails to acknowledge and engage positively with key stakeholders such as parents. It is therefore not surprising that the literature points to the repressive school climate for youth with the same-sex sexual orientations. I hold hopes that this study will shed light on how key stakeholders like parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of the children experience engagements with schools. The next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework that lens this study. The Bio-ecological model as a theory that frames this study is critical to illustrate the connections between the critical parties, their ecologies and dynamics that shape and influence relationships in the presence of sexual diversity.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter, discuss Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological model as theoretical framework for this study. Theories are put together to understand, predict, and explain a certain phenomenon which are in most cases formulated to challenge and extend on existing knowledge. I have adopted Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological theory as the basis for this study in explaining the impact of the social influences on parents, schools and the development of the youth with same-sex sexual orientations. Bronfenbrenner's theory is appealing to this because it considers the complex layers of dynamics that influence the school and parent relationships. The combination of parents and school experiences and achievement play a prime role in the socialization of the same-sex sexual orientation adolescents (Russel et al., 2010).

It is of importance that although Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological model is centred around and focus on the same-sex sexual orientation youth it is crucial to be reminded that two of the immediate ecologies of the youth is his/her parents and the school. These two ecologies influence the child in either a positive or a negative way.

### **3.2 BRONFENBRENNER'S SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological model offers a theoretical framework for understanding how individuals are affected by their surrounding environmental factors or ecologies. Organizing his theory into systems and creating a model depicting encircling levels around a child as the center point, Bronfenbrenner (2005) explains how the immediate and distant settings and the interactions between them influence the psychosocial development of the youth with same-sex sexualities. An increasing effort over the past decade has been made in order to understand the youth's development and to what influences their development (Watson, Varjas, Meyers & Graybill, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological theory approaches the youth's development within the systems of relationships between the parents and school that form part of his or her environment. This theory identifies different layers of the environment, each having a significant effect on the same-sex sexual orientation youth's

academic and psychosocial development which, in turn, influences their parents as well as their schools. It is imperative to note that the other way is also relevant to acknowledge the extent the home and school environment impacts on young people's holistic wellbeing and development. Any change in one layer will have a cascading effect on the other layer. Bronfenbrenner's model of human development stresses the importance of the interaction between people or any of the ecologies and their changing environments. With reference to this study, school youth with same-sex sexual orientations exists at the centre of Bronfenbrenner's model and their development is determined by the interaction with the members of the various settings they navigate (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). As mentioned before, the same-sex sexual orientation spends most of his or her time at school and at home.

For positive and sustainable developmental outcomes of any of the ecologies, the five layers of systems must be viewed and considered holistically when planning interventions for the identity development and positive well-being of the same-sex sexual orientation youth and the involvement of their parents and schools. It is important to remember that the Bio-Ecological System (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) theory reinforces the role of parents as well as the school in bringing about change, since, society is still very much heteronormative. For this study I worked with parents who affirm and embrace their child's same-sex sexuality.

The layers of Bronfenbrenner's theory consist of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. This model focuses on the relationships between the ecologies to ensure a safe and inclusive schooling space for this minority of oppressed youth who faces victimization, discrimination and inequality on a daily basis. I depict this interdependence and development in the figure below which after a discussion of the five different layers follow:

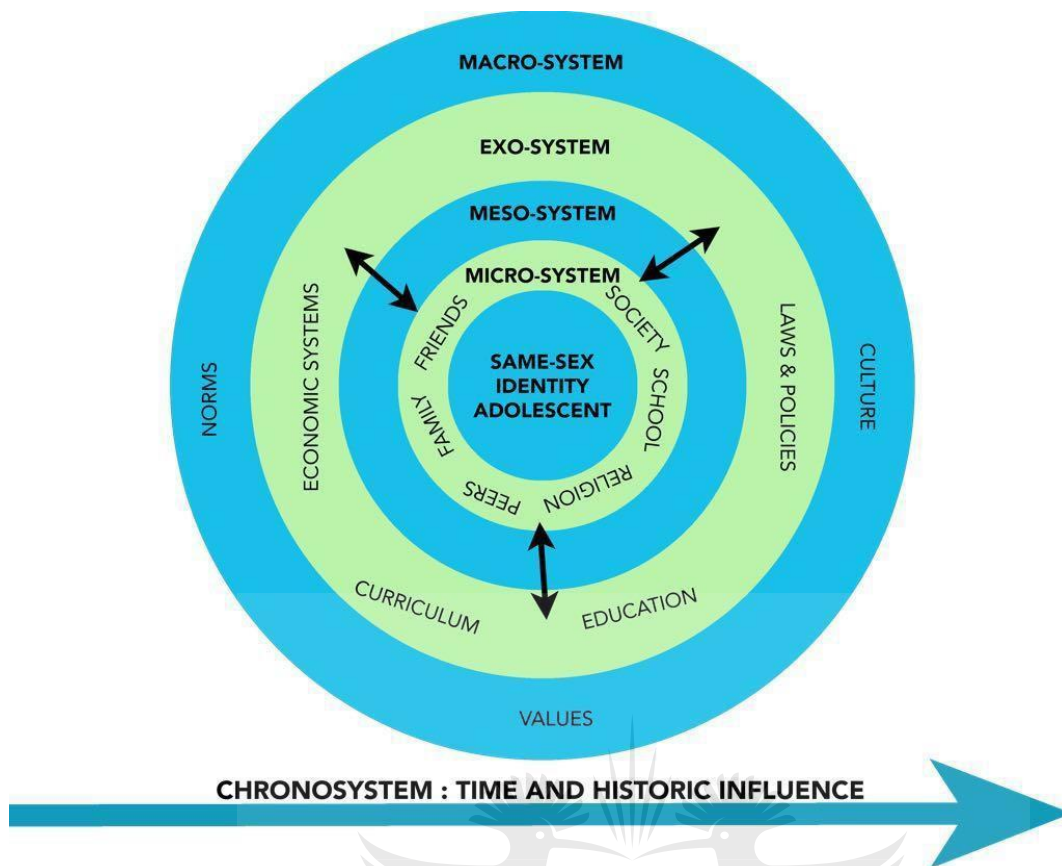


Figure 3.1: Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model

### 3.2.1 THE MICROSYSTEM

"A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.11).

The microsystem, according to Donald et al. (2002), is the layer nearest to the child. It contains structures which the individual interacts directly with. For the purpose of this study, the microsystem will focus on the parents and school but importantly placing the same-sex sexual orientation youth at the center of the model. In essence, the home and school are the first safety nets for any child. Victimization and harassment often target learners whose perceived sexual orientation is often based on their non-conformity to gender norms (Msibi, 2012). This construction has the potential to produce gender biases towards same-sex sexualities including questioning youth in schools ultimately

leading to homophobia and transphobia in schools (Francis, 2017). Same-sex sexual orientations have been associated with negative ideas (Simoni, 1996; Temple, 2005) and are labelled as deviant and immoral and thus separated from their heterosexual counterparts (Francis, 2012). According to Epstein (1995) most parents prefer involvement in their own children's education and learning in particular, rather than through, as in the case in South Africa, the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) as stipulated in the South African Schools Act (DOE, 1996b). Lewis and Naidoo (2004) point to the reluctance of educators to allow parents to assume decision-making roles with school governing platforms because it is perceived to be intrusive on their domain and parents are seen as over-stepping their boundaries. Hall and Engelbrecht (1999) emphasise that parents need to become involved in their children's education and this involvement must include aspects of wellbeing and development. The South African Schools Act (SASA) (DOE, 1996b) establishes the parents' right to access to information concerning a child held in schools. These reforms have mandated an environment for conducive parent involvement in schools, but actual parent involvement in South African schools remains weak (Heystek, 1999). Although these policies and legislation are commendable, this is, however, not a reality in South African schools. According to the literature mentioned, equal partnership between school and parents is still an ideal.

Significant agents and environments that directly interact with and influence youth with same-sex sexual orientations are considered part of the microsystem. The youths' microsystems include parents, teachers, school, religious institutions, peers and relatives. Parenting styles and parental characteristics are also considered an integral component of youth development and how the youth subsequently acts out different scenarios in his or her life (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Glasgow et al., 1997). It is crucial to understand the contributing role of support that parents have in order to ensure the optimal academic as well as psycho-social wellbeing of their child with a same-sex sexual orientation (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005; LaSala, 2013; Malpas, 2011). These authors underscore the high correlation between parent knowledge, beliefs, and interactive styles, with children's achievement in learning environments.

It is worth noting that schools and parents do not function independently and are part of society with similar ideals of optimal learning and healthy development of children.

South African parents predominantly respond negatively to the deviation of heterosexuality (Institute of Race Relations; The Other Foundation, 1996). It is thus uncommon to find parents who do affirm and support their children who identify as LGBT (Brown, 2019). It brings to question how such parents will be considered in schools when addressing issues of homophobic bullying within a school climate that is dissonant to sexual diversity.

### 3.2.2 THE MESOSYSTEM

"A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a youth, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 7).

The mesosystem provides the connection between the structures of the youth's microsystem. As explained above, it consists of a set of microsystems that continuously interacts with one another for example, with parents and the school. The meso-system also includes the interaction between the systems found in the microsystem, such as the school, family, friends, peers, church, and the surrounding neighbourhood and how they influence the attitudes and perceptions of homosexuality amongst each other (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). The development of an individual is enhanced by the consistent and positive interactional relationships among the microsystems (Donald, et al., 2006). Francis (2017) reminds us that heterosexist prejudice and discrimination results from attitudes and behaviours by peers, teachers, and school managers (Francis, 2017).

Religious influences that were inherited from our colonial past also continue to promote heteronormativity, to the subsequent heteronormativity and heterosexism arising from the intolerance of perceived immoral behaviours (Bhana, 2012). Many theologians argue that throughout the Old and the New Testament, the practice of homosexuality is condemned (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). While many European Union countries appear to accept homosexuality (Gerhards, 2010), the same views are not held by most African countries (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Louw, 2005). Homosexuality is still considered a crime in 38 African countries and many of these countries still retain their laws against homosexuality that were promulgated during the colonial era (Brown,



2019a). In the South African context, sociocultural traditions rooted in bigoted forms of Calvinism and patriarchal structures for Black South Africans have contributed to violence that includes “ corrective “ rape (Francis & Reygan, 2016) of non-gender-conforming woman and the beating of younger men by their elders to rid them from homosexual sexualities (Msibi, 2011). Religion thus influences the attitudes and perceptions of both the parents and school affecting the child with a same-sex sexual orientation.

For the purpose of this study it is important to note that what happens at home influences what happens at school and vice-versa (Rothman & Simmonds, 2015). Deacon, Morell and Prinsloo (1999) argue that teachers’ and schools’ views about democracy and transformation are often in conflict with the progressive policies and legislation in the country, with teachers and schools holding onto familiar patriarchy and religion. Schools are also social agents bearing the mark of culture, religion, sexuality and gender (Francis & Le Roux, 2011; Schoeman, 2006).

It is imperative develop to an understanding of the contributing factors in creating a overlapping hostile home and school environment in terms of sexuality. One of the most salient and influential environments for children is the school that constantly disseminate messages of identities and being (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Epstein, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mandel & Shakeshaft, 2000). It is thus critical to examine how these personal and social values influence the daily realities of youth with same-sex sexual orientations, and those they are associated with.

Deacon, Morell and Prinsloo (1999) argue that teachers’ views about democracy and transformation are often in conflict with the progressive policies in the country, with teachers holding on to familiar patriarchy and religion. While there is the potential for student-teachers to rethink these familiar understandings, heteronormativity cannot simply be addressed exclusively by stand-alone teaching modules but needs to be practically implemented across the schooling system.

Francis (2012) found that teachers do not adequately address issues of homosexuality and bisexuality in the classroom. He points out that teachers consciously or unconsciously promote a culture of heteronormativity and when a topic of sexuality is



addressed, they only refer to heterosexual youth or remain 'silenced'. This is perceived as the 'right' and 'normal' sexual orientation and normalizing heterosexuality, creating stigma and stereotyping. Bhana (2014) found that there were some parents who were supportive of policy and practice reform and open to dialogue around issues sexuality.

### 3.2.3 THE EXOSYSTEM

Bronfenbrenner discussed family processes in context and described an exosystem as

“...one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.9)

The exosystem involves the larger social system in which the youth may not function directly but which impacts his or her development by overlapping or interacting with some structures in the Microsystem.

While much research focusses on the Microsystem and the mesosystem, these levels are also influenced by other components in their environment. A key exosystem that affects the developing youth is the relationship between the parents, the parent's wider community and especially between the parents and schools. In a study done by Bhana (2013), she found that sex education was forcefully silenced and aspects of gender and sexual diversity were not discussed in schools as parents regarded it as a taboo and evil subject (Bhana, 2013).

Holistically, the ecological perspective indicates that in order to gain a better understanding of the same-sex sexual orientation youth, he or she needs to be seen against a backdrop of his/her family, the community and schools (Thaver & Leao, 2012). It is the responsibility of the parent to provide love, warmth, nutrition, supervision and encouragement as pre-requisites to a positive home environment and when viewed through the Bio-ecological perspective (Matee, 2018). This in turn may have a positive influence on the youth's academic performance and psychosocial wellbeing in school. The parent is seen as the “primary teacher” from birth and has observed all of the trials

and tribulations in terms of development and attaining milestones.

The shared responsibility of school and parents, on the other hand, reinforces collaboration, co-ordination and co-operation between the two (Epstein, 1987). Schools and parents share responsibilities for the socialisation and development of the youth. If this is the case, a positive overlap of responsibility between parent and school is anticipated.

Significant external structure depicts home and school dynamic contexts as influential variables that could influence the learning and development of youth depending on the increase or decrease of communication and collaboration (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Parents who assume a more active role are said to develop a deeper sense of appreciation for their role (Mncube, 2009).

Positive academic accomplishments and psychosocial wellbeing have been associated with parental participation and contribution (Mncube, 2009). Epstein's model of parental involvement suggests that home and school relations should be strengthened by a two way communication and reflect a co-equal partnership between parents and schools (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004).

The benefits of a positive home-school partnership on academic life is fairly researched (Epstein, 1987; Mncube, 2009; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). What lacks though, is the impact that a positive home-school partnership has on the psychosocial and sexual identity development of the same-sex sexual orientations school youth, not only in South Africa but globally. In reality, the transformation in South African education in terms of the SASA, the SACE, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the CAPS require parents to play a significant role in their children's education throughout their schooling career. Parental involvement as predicted by Donald et al. (2006) cannot be reinforced further than by both parents and teachers in school to facilitate transformation. The concept of parental involvement in this study implies that chances are given to parents to support the school and teachers, making them more effective in reaching academic goals (Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2002). The SASA stipulates that each public school should have a SGB, comprising of, amongst others, parents or guardians of present learners at school and members of the community, elected by the governing

body. However, initiatives by the DOE to promote parental participation in various other forms are almost non-existent (Mncube, 2009). The encouragement and management of parental support both at home and at school still remains the responsibility of each school.

If such a partnership can be established by means of better understanding of the same-sex sexual orientation youth, the family and the school can work together to support this minority group which are facing extreme treatment and circumstances in both society, home and school.

#### 3.2.4 THE MACROSYSTEM

The macrosystem represents the larger cultural context and outermost layer in which microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems are embedded. It consists of the attitudes, ideologies, laws, norms, policies and values of a particular culture in which the same-sex sexual orientation youth lives. For example, if it is the culture that a parent is solely responsible for raising his or her own children, there will be little or no interaction with the school; as a result, the youth's scholastic and psycho-social development will be affected. Due to the highly upheld cultural views and what society deems right and wrong in terms of sexuality, parents of same-sex sexual orientation children and schools are in conflict in terms of how to genuinely support the child and yet still maintain the 'cultural values' and stay within the norms.

The intolerance and injustice towards people with same-sex sexual orientations is motivated by the socio-cultural value system that is still strongly upheld in many societies (Bhana, 2013; Wilson, 2008) where tradition and culture playing a very crucial role in determining people's attitudes towards others regarding issues of sexual orientation (Reygan & Lynette, 2014). In a recent survey with 5000 participants across South Africa, findings revealed that 74 percent of respondents still perceive homosexuality as immoral, and 47 percent indicated that they would not accept a relative with a same-sex sexual orientation (The Other Foundation, 2016). While remarkable progress has been made in securing legislative protections for same-sex sexual orientation individuals, resistance to homosexuality is still visible and widely supported (Bhana, 2014). The former South African President, Jacob Zuma lashed out at homosexuality,

describing it as “un-African” and claiming that same-sex marriage is a disgrace to the nation and to God. (Francis & Msibi, 2011). Msibi (2012), Bhana (2014), and Richardson (2008) sum up the dire state of schooling for same-sex sexual orientation youth in South African schools. Such references from significant figures in could influence how South African youth will respect the constitution and have positive attitudes towards the oppressed. Diversity within South Africa is multi-faceted and includes, but it is not limited to various racial groups, genders, sexualities, religions, ethnicities, and class. All of these “supposing” protected under the flagship of the constitution. Such diversity lends itself to conflicts that often result from ignorance of the “other” (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Netshandama, 2013). With no visible monitoring mechanism, rights such as those of gender and sexual diverse youth are more often ignored and nullified.

### 3.2.5 THE CHRONOSYSTEM

The chronosystem exists outside of the model and explains how all these systems and their relationships with one another change over time. This applies specifically to gender and sexual diversity issues as evolutions occur in societal and cultural attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality as stipulated in the South African Constitution as well as the SASA. As society becomes more accepting, fewer negative messages filter down through the ecological systems to reach the developing youth at the center, thus reducing health risks and promoting a positive academic and psychosocial wellbeing of the same-sex sexual orientation youth.

Richardson (2008) writes about his experience of addressing principals in the Gauteng Province of South Africa on how to make schools lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)-friendly. He reports that many of the principals who attended the session said they had never before had the chance to discuss LGBT issues in Education, and many felt that in spite of South Africa’s progressive Constitution and the SASA, schools were not yet ready to deal openly with homosexuality and bisexuality (Richardson, 2008). In his study, it was even more shocking to hear that one of the principals at the talk said that there were no gay or lesbians in his school bringing

forward the idea of ignorance on the school's part and forcing the same-sex sexual orientation youth to remain silence and in hiding and to perform to their given gender. While many parents do respond negatively, at least at first to a child's disclosure of their sexual minority status, there is increasingly evidence demonstrating that these attitudes rarely remain stagnant (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen & Lindahl, 2013). There is evidence in South Africa that is suggesting that parents tend to become more tolerant of their children's minority sexuality over time (Matee, 2018; Brown, 2019).

### **3.3 CONCLUSION**

In line with Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological perspective, it is clear that the same-sex sexual orientation youth's experiences of safety and victimisation in school and communities may be shaped not only by their individual characteristics, but also by the sub-systems and interactions of these sub-systems (Kosciw et al., 2009). This theory also sheds light on the fact that the same-sex sexual orientation youth do not live in a vacuum, but are intersected by different ecologies in the system including parents and the school since it is in the layer closest to the child. This study, therefore, provided an understanding of how the ecologies interact and overlap home-school interactions (Watson et al., 2010).

In this chapter I explained and justified the use of Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological model and why it was helpful in answering my research questions. The next chapter discussed the methodology employed for this study.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discuss the methodology employed to conduct this study, and the justifications for the various approaches. The chapter also explains the methods of sampling, data collection, data analysis as well as the ethical issues in the study. The data analysis is also presented. Ethical considerations to this study was also discussed at the end of this chapter. This chapter, therefore, unpacks the rationale for the use of a qualitative research methodology in this study.

### **4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Since the main focus of the study was to understand the school engagement and responses of parents who embraced the same-sex sexual orientations of their children, the qualitative approach was an ideal approach. Howitt (2019) describes methodology as the study of the rules, procedures and practices by which research in a particular field of research obtain knowledge. “Qualitative methods are ways of studying people and their social worlds by going there, observing them closely, in their natural setting, and learning how they understand their situations and account for their behavior” (Richards, 2001, p. 61). Flick (2013) asserts that a qualitative research design helps the researcher understand the participants’ cultural and social interactions in their living spaces. During the semi-structured interviews, I encouraged the participants to be as open and reflective as possible. It should be noted that qualitative research is not based on a single methodology and does not belong to a single discipline (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It ‘draws on philosophical ideas in phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and other traditions to support the attention on “quality” rather than “quantity” (Brewer, 2003, p. 239). Therefore, the term is used as ‘an overarching category, covering a wide range of approaches and methods found within different research disciplines’ (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3).

Flick (2017) argues that due to a development that has become known as the pluralization of life worlds, qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations. Qualitative research is also pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experience

of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Qualitative research aims to obtain subjective knowledge that will be relayed by both the parents and the youth's experiences of school and school involvement. Creswell (2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations about social phenomena and aims to help us understand the real world we live in and its diverse forms of expressions. Qualitative research also uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena on context-specific settings, such as "real" world settings where the researcher avoids overt manipulation of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). An interpretive naturalistic approach, which is the approach to my study, means that qualitative researchers study aspects in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research, broadly defined, means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedure or other means of quantification" (Patton, 2002, p. 61). Studying phenomena in the context in which they occur is one of the core principles of qualitative research (Flick, 2013). In addition, Silverman (2005) suggests that usually the qualitative research topic stems from interest about the real world: this could be a direct experience, interest in practice, observations and growing scholarly interest. My research topic emanates from an interest about how parents and schools partner to create an inclusive and safe schooling space with youth with same-sex sexual orientations. Although it has been claimed that quantitative researchers attempt to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the research process, qualitative researchers have come to embrace their involvement and role within the research (Winter, 2000). These practices turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. Qualitative designs are just as systematic as quantitative designs, but they emphasize gathering data on naturally occurring phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Acknowledging socially constructed and multiple interpretations of "truths" contribute to the main critique against the use of qualitative research methodology. The concern with objectivity introduces the important process of reflexivity being defined as an attitude of attending systematically to the contexts of knowledge construction, especially to the effect



of the researcher with every step of the research process.

#### **4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

A paradigm consists of the following components: ontology, epistemology and methodology that brings forward the ontological position of interpretivism as relativism. Relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person. Research paradigms are the lens through which knowledge or understanding are viewed (Golafshani, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This study assumes an interpretivist paradigm because it aims to explore the significances which participants place on the societal meaning under investigation and, in doing so, generate meanings and make new ideas (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Golafshani, 2003).

Ontology describes the relation of research and reality (Flick, 2013) and is the assumption concerned with what reality is, in other words “what is” and concerned with the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Reality emerges when consciousness engages with objects which are already potent with meaning. While not used in this study, social construction as a theory maintains that reality is socially constructed, meaning that it is based on shared beliefs about the world around us. This theory critiques the notion of fixed and permanent realities and concepts such as gender, sex, sexuality, heterosexuality and homosexuality. These dominantly held beliefs are dismissed on the basis that human beings in the same space and time may construct different realities about similar situations based on their agreed set of beliefs. This view, therefore, presents the possibility of multiple truths and nullifies the rigidity applied to their perceived validity.

Epistemology on the other hand, is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Howitt (2019) explains epistemology as a central area of philosophy which focusses on various aspects of knowledge such as its nature and its sources. So it is possible to speak of qualitative and quantitative psychology having different epistemological foundations or assumptions. He also describes epistemology as a central idea of philosophy which focuses on various aspects of knowledge such as its nature and its sources. The interpretative epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on the real-world phenomena which will be applied to my study. The real world

does not exist independently of our knowledge. Epistemology is concerned with the ways of knowing and learning about the social world and focusses on questions such as how we can know about reality and what is the basis of our knowledge. Every paradigm is based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. It is thus concerned with ways of knowing and learning about the social world and focuses on questions such as: how can we know about reality and what is the basis of our knowledge (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The research design employed by this study is qualitative and of an exploratory and contextual nature. The reason I made use of the qualitative data generation approach is that it provides rich and detailed information about affected populations; it provides perspectives of specific social and cultural contexts and can be carried out with limited resources (Creswell, 2014).

#### **4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that is important or significant for the narrator or his or her audience (de Medeiros & Rubinstein, 2015). For the context of my study, the narratives of both the parents with children with same-sex sexual orientations, as well as the youth with same-sex sexual orientation were explored through an interview approach.

#### **4.5 DATA COLLECTION**

This study used qualitative semi-structured interviews as a tool to collect data. By making use of semi-structured interviews it allowed me to engage with the participants. This in-depth qualitative method of data collections allowed me to obtain rich data pertaining to the participant's experiences, which would not be easily afforded by other non- qualitative methods (Flick, 2013).

Rubin and Rubin (2012, p 29) outline interviews as "in- depth qualitative interviewing" which is characterized three features; interviewers look for rich and detailed information, not for yes-or-no, agree or disagree responses. One of my primary motivations for conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews was to allow my participants to share as much of their experiences with school involvement without any interference of structure that has the

potential to break the participant's train of thought and allowed me to explore social issues that would otherwise be difficult to quantify in quantitative methods. The order of the questions in the interview schedule were rearranged throughout the interviews to suit each of the participants, depending on their comfort, background knowledge, and attitude towards me, as the interviewer. The interview process allowed me to interact with the participants. According to Howitt (2019), the written transcript is a verbatim (word-for-word) record of speech or sometimes sections of spoken word particularly relevant to the research question.

The semi-structured interview is viewed as a form of relaxed conversation about previously determined topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It is commonly used when researchers wish to gather information on lived experiences from individuals, in this case the experiences and perceptions of parents of same-sex identity orientation children and the same-sex sexual identity youth him/her-self (LaSala, 2013). The use of open-ended questions and following highlighted themes helped prevent the interviewer from straying from the interview guide. In my interview questions, I repeated, where necessary, the same questions, in different words, to enrich my data collection. Some notable advantages of semi-structured interviews include the convenience of having questions prepared ahead of time, enabling the researcher to be prepared for the interview. Semi-structured interviews also allow the participants the freedom to express their own views on their own terms. It is important to note that the inclusion of the youth was for the purpose of triangulation to enrich the data that was collected.

Probing during the interviews stimulated discussions. Interviewers use probes when they do not understand what the respondent has narrated for further clarification. I anticipated that some of the terminology as set out in chapter one, was new and unknown to them and I had to simplify the terms.

All parent participants agreed to meet within the home environment. Interviews were mainly conducted in the afternoons when parents were from work. Five interviews with the youth participants were conducted at home while one was conducted in an office at the university. Two interviews were conducted in Afrikaans on request and families with African descent opted for English. All interviews with youth participants were conducted in English. The interviews with the young people were all conducted before the interviews with parents with the hope that it would present me with insight to their school experiences and any

awareness of parental engagements with schools that emanated from it.

#### **4.6 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING**

Sampling, in any study, is a way of how data will be collected without generalising from a specific group of people. The objectives, purpose and aim of my study guided me in determining which population the data was collected from, and how many participants were selected for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This study embarked on purposive sampling due to the specific nature of the research study. The study enquired how parents, who affirm and embrace their child's same-sex sexuality and their experiences school involvement. Purposive sampling, typically used to focus on particular characteristics of a population of interest, enabled me to answer my three research questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

The initial set of participants in my study brought an awareness of the challenge to identify the most suitable participants to meet the criteria for a complex study of this nature. I additionally employed snowball sampling as this nature of participants are not always readily available due to the social dissonance to sexual diversity in South Africa. Snowball sampling is often employed when the sample being studied is hidden, either as a result of low numbers or due to the sensitivity of the topic which was the case for my study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Snowball sampling can also entail the recruitment of participants through the use of social networks (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This is how I recruited the participants for this study.

I initially considered convenience, purposive sampling. I approached mother, located in Bloemfontein (my home-town) who engaged in activism for families of children with LGBTI identities. She introduced me to other families who presented similar realities. The unfortunate reality was that many of these parents were unaware of their children's same-sex sexual orientation while the child was at school. Only two families met my criteria and they were from Bloemfontein in the Free State province. This was only discovered during the interview. The initial data did not align with the objectives and aim of the study and I was required to seek participants that meet the criteria. This challenging process was resolved when I became active in the queer student organisation at my workplace and the

assistance of students enabled the location suitable participants. I managed to identify two participants from friends in the queer student organisation whose peers and parents were willing to take part in this study. They lived in Qwaqwa in the Free State Province of South Africa. I also attended a seminar at my institution of study where a young person with an intersex identity shared his school and social experiences. I approached the presenter who was willing to participate in my study and in consultation, the father who also agreed. This is how I identified the fifth pair of participants. They are from Springs in Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province. The sixth participating family was through a referral of participant no. 5 and they are from Soweto, Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province. The initial interest of participant six was sought by participant five. The mother of participant six agreed to share her experience. It is important to highlight that the two intersex participants only discovered the sexual development very recently and identified as lesbians when they were at school. Initial communication with participating parents and young people were conducted telephonically to brief them about the purpose and objectives of the study as well as to arrange with initial data collection. They expressed their willingness to participate.

The first mother and her gay son as well as the participants with intersex developments are activist and actively advocate and educate about queer identities respectively. The two intersex participants belong to a civil society where they educate various communities about intersex bodies.

The above experience highlights identified a few advantages to snowball sampling. Snowball sampling avoids certain biases associated with 'categorisation of groups' Browne (2005). Through purposeful sampling, I managed to select particular elements from the population that were representative or informative about my topic of interest (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). It is important to raise the experience to other researchers as the nature of participants are not easily and readily available and rendered invisible, because they are not always validated by mainstream society.

#### **4.7 PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION SETTING.**

My participants included 6 parents and 6 youth who since school days identified with same-sex sexual orientations. The inclusion criteria for the participants to participate in this study

was:

For the same-sex sexual orientations youth:

1. They had to be above the age of 18 at the time of data collection;
2. They had to be self-identified as individuals with a same-sex sexual orientation with parents who embraced their sexual orientation;
3. They had to have disclosed their same-sex sexuality to their parents during school years;
4. Parents were expected to have known about the same-sex sexual orientation of their children while they were in school. In addition, parents must have had engagements with their children's school regarding issues of sexual orientation.

For the parents of the same-sex sexual orientations youth:

1. They have to have a child/children with a same-sex sexual orientation;
2. Their same-sex sexual orientation child had to have disclosed their sexual identity to them while he/she was still in school and
3. They had to have affirmed their child's non-heterosexual orientation.

My participants came from diverse backgrounds. The individual, semi-structured interviews were held at a location most convenient to the participants.

A single interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted at a venue of the participant's choice. The participation was dependent upon their willingness to form part of the interview, their availability as well as their suitability. The study was, however, limited in terms of the specific views presented by the 6 parents and the 6 youths. The study, therefore, cannot be generalized, but was presented by those parents and youth who were willing and available to participate in the study.

## 4.8 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Clark (2016) claims that data analysis is taking unprocessed data, reducing it, and lastly interpreting that raw data to make it meaningful and understandable. This study employed thematic analysis to analyse the data. Clark (2016) explains that thematic analysis focus on the examining of themes and patterns to make meaning of the data. Working with Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, the data was analysed using step-by-step procedure, which began by seeking through the interviews that were conducted with all the 12 participant, repeating patterns of meaning in their description and understanding of the parents and their experiences with school involvement regarding their non-heterosexual child. Themes were then produced. The thematic analysis allows for the themes that arise from the constructed reality relayed by participants to be captured and relayed in the research findings. Thematic analysis, therefore, requires an understanding of the content provided by the transcribed interviews. I familiarised myself with the transcripts through repetitive reading thereof. Patterns and common themes within the data were sought. Themes were categorised in a manner that serves to provide comprehensible interpretation. Themes that were not aligned with the aims of the study were disregarded. As the data were reviewed, through the testing of themes in the data, headings were generated through merging correlating categories. This was followed by the searching of relationships between categories and by linking them to produce a holistic picture of the experiences of disclosure of my participants (Aronson, 1994). One of the main reasons for thematic analysis was that it interprets various aspects of the research topic. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. I made use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for identifying, analysing, and reporting qualitative data using thematic analysis.



The six steps were as follows:

Step 1.	Familiarizing myself with my data
Step 2.	Generating initial codes
Step 3.	Searching for themes
Step 4.	Reviewing themes
Step 5.	Defining and naming themes
Step 6.	Producing the report

Familiarising myself with my data:

These steps enabled me to fully immerse and actively engage in the data by firstly transcribing the 12 interviews (6 parents and 6 youth with same-sex sexual orientation) and then the reading and re-reading of the transcriptions and listening to the recordings. The initial ideas were noted down. A comprehensive understanding of the content was developed to familiarise myself with all the aspects of the data. This step provided the foundation for the subsequent analysis that would follow. This is a key phase of data analysis within interpretive qualitative methodology (Bird, 2005). During this phase, I repeatedly read through the transcripts and studied the field notes that I gathered during the interviews. My field notes included observations during my interviews which could not have been detected on the recordings. The second phase listed ideas what was in the data and what was resonating with my research questions and objectives. I made use of coding as it is part of analysis since I organised my data into meaningful groups. A systematically through the entire data set provided full and equal attention to each item, and identified interesting aspects in the data items that formed the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set.

### Generating initial codes:

After familiarising myself with the data from the interviews, I identified preliminary codes which were the features of the data that appeared relevant and meaningful to the focus of the study. The anticipation was that these codes would be more numerous and specific than themes, but provided me with a good indication of the context of the data captured during interviews with the participants.

### Searching for themes:

The third step of the analysis process was to collate the codes and sorted all the relevant data according to identified themes. All codes were analysed and subsequently combined to form overarching themes. This phase was concluded with a collection of themes, and subthemes, and all extracts of data that have been coded in relation to them. The identified themes were linked with the respective research questions. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2017), themes were supported with detail, critical and reflective discussions, supporting quotes from data set, and other forms of evidence provided by the participants. It is through this examination of the text a deeper understanding of the investigation was sought (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

### Reviewing themes:

Identified themes were reviewed with the possibility to combine, refine, separate, or discard the initial themes identified in the previous phase of analysis. This process was done over two phases, where the themes were checked in relation to the coded extracts in phase 1 and 2.

### Defining and naming themes:

This step involved refining and defining the themes and potential subthemes within the data. I provided theme names and clear working definitions that captured the essence of each

theme in a concise and punchy manner. At this point, a unified story of the data emerged from the themes. A detailed analysis was written for each theme to identify the “story” that each theme told. As part of the refinement, I explored whether themes contained any sub-themes.

Producing the report:

The analysis was transformed and finalized into an interpretable piece of writing by using vivid and compelling extract examples from my transcriptions that related to the themes, research questions and the literature of this study. I ensured as far as possible that the analysis and the results went beyond a mere description of the themes and the analysis was supported with empirical evidence that addressed the research questions.

#### **4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Graham and Powell (2015) points to consent as critical in any research as it alludes to respects for research participants, their dignity and the autonomy. This should be a voluntary process with no pressure or physical and/or psychological coercion (Getz, 2002). The process of participant recruitment should consider comprehensive information regarding the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). All of my participants agreed to take part on the basis of informed consent. Before the start of the interview, each participant read the written information form which detailed the purpose of the procedures involved in this study and signed the form. I further explained to the participants that they are free to end the interview at any stage and would be given the choice of whether or not the data should be destroyed immediately. Ellis (2007) underscores the basic human rights considerations particularly when conducting research that is of a sensitive nature. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) insist that researchers take the responsibility to protect the identity of the participants. It was agreed that the real name of participants during the course of the interview will not be used to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were further allocated with the discussions of the data. It is worth mentioning that participants who assumed advocacy roles preferred their real names. I however decided against this considering the danger that many LGBT identities were subjected to in the recent past and findings from the literature. The recordings of the interviews, by means of a Dictaphone, were identified using code numbering. This made it

impossible to identify the participants from the interview recordings or the transcripts. The recordings were stored on separate CD's in a locked safe in my office's safe. Only my supervisors and I had access to the data. Directly after each interview, a debriefing session took place, giving both myself and the participants the opportunity to discuss issues that arose from the interview, clarify procedures from that point on, and express thanks and gratitude. Furthermore, the research was conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg. An ethical clearance certificate was issued. Even though all the participants were above the age of 18, some of the questions might have brought back bad memories and experiences. For this reason a clinical psychologist was also available in all three locations to assist with therapy. These services were however not needed or requested by any of my participants. It was made clear from the onsets that no rewards such as money or gifts would be given for their participation in the study. All of above were clearly explained to the participants, including the purpose and objectives of the study in order for them to make an informed decision on whether to participate or not. With the above mentioned I acknowledged the importance of confidentiality and autonomy and addressed them as discussed.

#### **4.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Morrow (2006) outlined four strategies to increase trustworthiness and rigor; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure the credibility of the study, I made provisions to promote confidence that I have accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny.

Pilot and Beck (2014) is of the view that the trustworthiness method should consider the careful consideration of the interview process and techniques, aspects of debriefing and strategies of triangulation. Yin (2001) proposed the use of multiple sources of evidence for the basis of credibility. Triangulation was employed by recruiting the parents and the child to correlate the data that was collected since the main focus of the study was based on the experiences of the parents and their involvement of the school. The narratives from the different sources of data confirmed and provided the different perspectives presented.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested, I established dependability by creating an audit trail through various debriefings with significant people. Frequent debriefing sessions were conducted with my supervisors. In addition, opportunities for scrutiny of the project by colleagues, peers and academics were also done by means of three presentation and critical questioning and answering sessions during the period of my study at the University of Johannesburg.

Conformability is associated with the valid interpretation data and findings as well a true reflection of the responses by participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This aspect was particularly significant in this study as my personal experiences closely related to many of the participants and required from me to put aside my personal feelings and preconceptions. I therefor embarked on member check-in for participants to accept or refute the content and established categories.

To establish transferability of qualitative study researchers have to present a detailed description of the context and the participants as well as to be transparent about the processes of data analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The aim is to provide to readers a comprehensive understanding and fully inform them of the research. This dynamics have been presented throughout the study, more so in the methodology and findings and discussions chapters. In addition to these aspects Merriam (2005) propose that the sample closely represents the population. In this instance I had to identify another cohort of participants to that match the objective of the study and collected a new set of data. Data saturation was explored by the sample size (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). They argue that large sample sizes do not necessarily guarantee data saturation but the assurance that the selected sample size is representative in nature and characteristics. The second set of participants, six parents and their six children, had a clear pre-screening process to ensure that they match the criteria set for this study.

#### **4.11 HAPTER OVERVIEW**

In this chapter the methodologies deployed in carrying out this study were outlined. It discussed the chosen methods and the justifications for the appropriateness to this study. I also explained what sampling methodology was used as well as tools for data collection. The ethical processes are also detailed. The following chapter presents my findings and

analysis and discussions in an interwoven approach.



## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 5 provides the data collection and a discussion of the findings of the study. This chapter starts by unpacking the findings and highlight the identified discourse strands that have emerged from the analysis of the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews with the parents of same-sex sexuality youth as well as their children. The interviews with parents served as the primary data for this study as it was the focus. The youth were interviewed for the purpose of trustworthiness as discussed in the previous chapter. Discourse strands were lifted in this study, because they exist within texts as what is commonly referred to as topics or themes. The text is, therefore, made up of fragments from various strands. According to Creswell (2005), there are plenty of studies in which transcript selections are acceptable and appropriate when analyzing and reporting data. The data collected was plentiful and naturally overlapped. These overlaps enabled me to see replication, hence my thick description enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Discourse strands can often intertwine within the text aimed at addressing multiple topics. This was the case of this study. The research was based on the experiences of 6 parents of same-sex sexuality children together with their children. All together the sample added up to 12 participants. My participants presented a diverse population based on their ethnicity, home languages, genders, locations and socio-economic backgrounds.

I was able to identify certain themes by reading through the transcripts several times. The themes were then corroborated with the initial themes that were in the literature review, while incorporating Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Model as a theoretical framework. Themes from all the interviews were examined in order to determine the most consistent themes that emerged from the text (McCracken, 1998). Three main themes emerged from the collected data. The identified themes aimed at highlighting the commonly recurring experiences by my participants. Each of the main themes also had sub-themes. Although the initial perception was that the experiences were unique, there appeared to be many similarities between the participants' experiences. This chapter begins by illustrating the biographical information of the participants. It will be followed by a detailed discussion of the findings.



## 5.2 PARTICIPANTS

This section provides a description of the sample as illustrated bellow. The table depicts an overall view of the sample, including the pseudonyms for both the youth and their parents, their sex and the type of school they attended.

### Biographical details of participants

Participant set Nr 1:

Mother: Nonkululeko

Son: Tsepiso

Nonkululeko and her son, Tsepiso are both black South Africans living in the Qwaqwa rural district of the eastern Free State. Tsepiso is a self-disclosed gay male who “proudly” and publicly embrace his identity. Nonkululeko is a single parent since her husband (Tsepiso’s father) passed away four years ago. Financially, Nonkululeko struggles to support her two children as one is a first year student and she pays for his study fees etc. Nonkululeko works in the retailing sector and is of a lower socio-economical background. Nonkululeko and Tsepiso is both IsiZulu speaking individuals, but Tsepiso took English as home language in school. Nonkululeko however is fluent in English and preferred the interviews to be conducted in English. Tsepiso attended a few high schools but were all combined, multi-racial public schools. Tsepiso comes across as a very flamboyant and effeminate.

Participant set Nr 2:

Mother: Kelebogile

Son: Neo

Kelebogile and her biological son, Neo are also both black South Africans living in the Qwaqwa rural district of the Free State. Kelebogile is a single mother who has not seen

her husband for over 10 years. She thus raised her son Neo alone. Neo identifies as a transgender female and embraces her sexuality since she did not hide it since commencing high-school. Kelebogile refers to Neo as a “her” and “she”. She has been supportive of Neo’s “expressions” regardless. Kelebogile works at a local higher education institution in the Qwaqwa region. She has a middle socio-economic background and raises three children alone. Neo is now a first year student at the same higher education institution that Kelebogile works at. Neo is a proud transgender person who wears female clothing and wears make-up. Both Kelebogile and Neo are Sotho speaking individuals but as with Neo, he also took English as home language. Both Neo and Kelebogile were fluent in English and had no objections of conducting the interviews in English even though I did mention that there are translation service available if they chose to conduct the interviews in their home-language. Neo attended two high schools which were both black, combined public schools.

Participant set Nr 3:

Mother: Susan

Son: Gerrie

Susan is married to her second husband. Gerrie’s father lives in Pretoria in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, but does not have contact with him. Susan and Gerrie are both white Afrikaans speaking individuals. Susan is a hairdresser and earns a reasonable salary. Gerrie is now 22 years old and is still living with his mother and is currently not working and not interested in studying further, even though his mother made financial provisions for him to do so upon finishing school. Gerrie went to a few high schools, yet did not finish grade 12.

Participant set Nr 4:

Mother: Maria

Son: Wanda

Maria and Wanda are both located in Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State Province. They are both white Afrikaans speaking individuals. Maria is also a single mother

with Wanda being her only child. Maria work for the Department of Water affairs and earns a middle class income. Wanda is now 24 and still living in her mother's house. Her mother supports her financially since Wanda works at a local bar as a waitress. Even though the finances were there, Wanda did not continue with further education. Wanda attended an Afrikaans, combined public school which mainly consisted mostly of white and colored learners. Maria and Wanda's home language is Afrikaans but had no objection to conducting the interviews in English. Like Gerrie, Wanda also did not complete grade 12 and never attempted to do so.

Participant Nr 5:

Father: Gomolemo

Child: Kamogelo (Kamo)

Gomolemo is 54 years old and lost his wife four years ago due to organ failure. He has two daughters. The eldest daughter, Kamogelo (now 23 years) was born with a fully developed penis and vagina. Kamo has gone through what is called corrective surgeries since the age of 11 months. Gomolemo explained that Kamo went through numerous test and chromosomal results showed that Kamo would develop breast. The doctors proposed that Kamo be raised as a girl and that the penis would be surgically removed. Kamo has undergone several surgeries and remained in hospital till the age of 7. She was told that she needs to stay in hospital because of kidney problems. Her first realization of difference was when she shared a bath with a sister who was two years younger. She wanted to know from her parents as she explained in her own words, why her vagina was different. They told her that all people look different. She was told to never undress in the presence of other people. Despite this warning, mom's friends always wanted to see her bodily reconstructions. She recalls as a little call how she had to address and did not understand what the aunts were looking at. Dad's family claimed that it is a bad omen from the ancestors and proposed to him that he should sell her to witchdoctors to make muthi (traditional medicine) from her body. She has an attraction for females and identified as a lesbian. She learned about her intersex development at the age of 21 and is navigating to

reclaim that identity. Kamo still experience side effects from the multiple surgeries. Kamo completed grade 12 and studied towards a diploma in sport science.

Participant Nr 6:

Mother: Maleratho

Child: Thami

Maleratho is Sotho speaking widow with three children, two boys and when child born as intersex but registered as female. Maleratho explained that at birth of Thami had a bit of a problem. She was told that Thami has both sex organs but the female was more developed. She was told to raise Thami as a female and not to tell others of this problem. She was told that it could be fixed through surgery. She always refused. She noticed that Thami portrait predominantly masculine behaviour but accepted it and took a position that Thami is God's creation. She was comfortable to conduct the interview in English. Thami dropped out at grade 10 in 2018. Thami was 21 and became despondent because he repeated almost every grade in high school. He pointed out that before he could learn he first had to deal with who he was. Thami's gender registration indicates female as was recommended by the doctor. Thami only recently learned about the intersex development from a friend with similar development. Thami's female sex anatomy is more developed than the male sex anatomy. For this reason Thami assumed a lesbian sexual identity and prefers 'he, his, him' as pronouns because of the strong masculine feelings. He also is attracted to females and is in a relationship with one.

<i><b>Pseudonym of parent</b></i>	<i><b>Pseudonym of same-sex sexuality youth</b></i>	<i><b>Gender</b></i>	<i><b>Identified sexual orientation of youth members</b></i>	<i><b>Race</b></i>	<i><b>Type of school/s attended by the youth</b></i>	<i><b>Location</b></i>
1. Nonkululeko	Tshepiso	Male	Gay	Black	Combined, multi-racial public schools	Qwaqwa, Free State Province
2. Kelebogile	Neo	Male	Trans-Gender	Black	Black, combined public school	Qwaqwa, Free State Province
3. Susan	Gerrie	Male	Gay	White	Combined, multi-racial public school	Bloemfontein, Free State Province
4. Maria	Wanda	Female	Lesbian	White	Combined, multi-racial school	Bloemfontein, Free State Province
5. Gomolemo	Kamogelo	Intersex-Female Registered	Lesbian	Black	Secondary School East Rand of Johannesburg	Johannesburg, Gauteng Province
6. Maleratho	Thami	Intersex-Female Registered	Lesbian	Black	Secondary School Dropped out at grade 10	Johannesburg, Gauteng Province

Table 5.1: Summary of participants' biographical information

### 5.3 THEMES

This section focuses on the presentation and discussion of the themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview transcripts. The following main themes with their sub-themes emerged:

**Theme 1: Parental experiences and expectations.**

**Subtheme 1.1:** Parents embracing their child's same-sex sexual orientation.

**Subtheme 1.2:** Teaching of gender and sexual diversity in schools – creating awareness.

**Theme 2: Experiencing being young and with a same-sex sexuality- parental perspectives on a heteronormative and heterosexism schooling space.**

**Subtheme 2.1:** Schools being spaces of heteronormativity and heterosexism- parents motivated to become involved in schools.

**Subtheme 2.2:** The consequences of the youth embracing your same-sex sexuality in schools – the experiences and support of the parents.

**Theme 3: School involvement and interventions**

**Subtheme 3.1:** Moving schools as only other option.

**Subtheme 3.2:** Communication between the home and the school.

### 5.3.1THEME 1: PARENTAL EXPERIENCES

#### SUBTHEME 1.1: PARENTS EMBRACING THEIR CHILD'S SAME-SEX SEXUALITY

Prior studies have noted that parents are the first, and in most cases, the most constant source of social support for young people, and thus provide young people with a socio-emotional base and social capital from which they navigate the challenges of school, peers, and the transition to adulthood (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2012). As seen from the narratives, all six of my parents accepted and embraced their child's same-sex sexuality, yet their children did not have the quality life and perform academically as they wished. This supports the reason for this study in that there needs to be a partnership between both the home and school in order to support school youth to develop holistically. The two intersex parents explained that a lesbian identity was known to society although not widely accepted. Gomolemo mentioned that the notion on intersex was perceived as some form of freak and not being human. His family saw the development of his child as a punishment from the ancestors. By accepting his daughter with a lesbian identity was a form of protection from the harsh perceptions that intersex bodies had in his community. For this reason he has hidden it for 21 years from his child. The incongruence between a bargaining homosexual identity and what society, school and family appears to demand, can thus exert considerable pressure to conform on a young person (Butler & Astbury, 2008) and on parents equally (LaSala, 2013).

From my interviews it was notable that the parents of the same-sex sexual orientation youth realised that something was "different" about their child from a very young age. It is also during these years that a sense of identity in relation to self, others, and society can be especially challenging for same-sex sexual identity youth in a predominantly heterosexual society (Chutter, 2007; Wright & Perry, 2006). The extracts below shows that all six of my parent participants accepted and even embraced their child's same-sex sexuality from childhood because of non-normative expressions or other physical differences in the case of those who were born with intersex developments.

*Kelebogile: "I knew from when she was just a girl, 1 years old. I already knew then that she was different...she didn't want to wear boys clothes. At first I wanted to change it but*



*now my child is happy so I am happy. She is my daughter (transgender)”.*

*Maria: “She was just acting differently...the way she talked, the way she spoke about girls. The way she dressed and all of these things made me realise that she was a lesbian... at first I didn’t know what to do, but then I knew I loved my child for who she is and I will never abandon her. I became very protective over her”.*

*Nonkululeko: “My son told me at the age of 12, as if we didn’t know already, that he was gay. We spoke about it. I took some time to think and then told him that I love him no matter what”.*

*Gomolemo: “We were told by the doctor to raise Kamo as a girl and not mentioned to her about the surgeries. We told her that she had kidney problems. When she was about 11 years she told us that she is not comfortable with a dress. My wife and I thought that the doctors removed the wrong parts. Kamo’s behaviour was more like a boy but when she developed breast we were relieved. She however wanted to help me in the garden and was there when I fixed the car. She was never happy with female duties in the house. As parents we decided to accept what we see for we lost already 7 years of her living in hospital. We just wanted her to be happy. The problem was with the school uniform. It was a battle with the school till we had to tell them the full story”.*

*Susan: “We always knew Gerrie was gay and me and my husband has spoken about it a lot. It was more difficult for him than for me. We wanted Gerrie to tell us, but he didn’t want to. Only after we sat down with him and told him that if he was gay, we would love and accept him no matter what. He then started crying and said he thinks he is gay. This was when he was in grade 9 (age 15)”.*

*Maleratho: “Although the doctors told me that Thami has more female developments, from a young age I could see he want to do things that boys are doing. I tried to put on dresses at the age of 3 and 4 but he would always take it off. I was afraid that people would see his problem and decided to buy boy clothes to have him covered. Thami*

*played more with the little boys and like their toys. I did not mind as long as the kids did not find out about his problem. I was always scared to let him out of my sight.”*

The above-stated narratives reveal that not only did the parents know from a young age that their child's gender expression was different from the sex, but that they embraced their child, regardless of his/her expression. The expressions were marked by the restrictive gender scripts that were noticeable from early childhood. It is important to point how aspects such as toys, clothing and association with peers create the divide between sex and gender and how the conflation thereof caused emotional turmoil for the children and their parents. The common thread among parents was the desire to see that their children were happy and that they feel loved while safety became a major consideration for the parents of the children who were born with intersex developments. For Maleratho the protection of her child was of critical importance which signifies that society is not very considerate of difference and the unknown. Although the home environment could be accommodating and accepting to the deviation from the norm gender scripts, parents were all conscious of the risk of the outside world. Gomolemo was concerned about the school and that his registered female child has trouble with female clothes. This requirement in school became an issue since schools have clear gender binary rule with regards to uniform and sex. The smooth transition from an accommodating home environment to schools with strong binary practices presented a challenge to these parents from early on. I am conscious of the focus of this study is largely on secondary school experiences, but what these narratives point out is that discourses of gender and sexual diversity starts very early in the lives of children hence inclusion of sexual diversity discussions should start from primary school level. More so, these narratives highlight the challenges of a fixed gender binary school culture throughout all phases. The gender expression negotiations of parents and schooling systems is subsequently a concern and required school involvement from the onset. There is a further challenge with the negotiation, in all efforts to keep their children happy, parents had to tread on a thin line of child comfort and wellbeing in schools and disclosure of the child's sexual orientation and other personal information. Msibi (2012), Bhana (2014) and Francis (2017) pointed that schools were unsafe places for children with non-heterosexual gender expressions. These young people were certainly dealing with their own challenges while possibly

confronted with a compulsory heteronormative school environments. Parental involvement in the school setting risked the children's choice of coming to terms with the self and the timing of disclosure of their sexual orientation.

#### SUB-THEME 1.2: TEACHING OF GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS – CREATING AWARENESS.

Teaching and learning about gender and sexuality is key to the creation of sustainable safe and inclusive schooling environments (Francis, 2019). All six parent participants suggested that the answer to creating a school culture free of heteronormativity and heterosexism lies with the teaching and learning of gender and sexual diversity for all learners.

*Susan: "I think the school, in their Life Orientation Programs or so... the kids must be taught and made aware of these things so that people know more and be more informed. When I attended a class meeting with the register teacher, we spoke about issues of gays and lesbians. I asked her if it was taught in schools and her response was it was the job of the Life Orientations teachers. She however said she will speak to the principal about bullying and the violence".*

*Nonkululeko: "I wish the school could teach the children or my son's peers about children who have different sexual orientations other than just be straight... I want the school to teach the kids about these issues".*

*Kelebogile: "Neo told me of the bullying in the bathrooms. There was a lot of scuffling and name calling that cause huge unhappiness. I went to the school to ask how they could help. The principal said it is new to them and they will consult with the district office. I thought this information was part of becoming a teacher. It must be."*

*Maleratho: "I never knew anything of intersex until I gave birth to Thami. It never learned about it in schools. I accepted that the doctors told me that something is wrong. I just did*

*not want my child to go through the knives in hospital while he was so young. He had to make his own decisions. I am not sure if children learn about gays and lesbians but I know they are in our community and they are seen on TV. It is important that they learn of these people because they are treated badly.”*

*Maria: “Look, I believe that if you are aware of it, and you can inform the kids with whom your child interacts on a daily basis... and educate them well enough, you would not have so many problems or issues. You take them and you tell them ok, this is the impact it has on the kids and that it is not a choice.*

*Gomolemo: “My child was born like this. It is only with Casta’s news that I learned other people are also like this. I thought it was only my child. Now she is a girl but behave like a boy. They call them stabane in my area. I hope schools can teach about these people. They don’t choose this thing.”*

As mentioned in the foregrounding literature review, gender and sexual diversity is not addressed in schools even though included in the formal curriculum. Thus, what the parents wanted, is something that was an ideal. The plea-like reference to the teaching of diverse sexual orientation from parents hoped that such knowledge in schools would bring about understanding and behaviour change. Kelebogile was surprised to find that schools did not know how to accommodate transgender learners particularly with issues of facilities. This challenge stems from the much gendered binary nature of schools that expects that a person’s sex and gender should be in alignment (Brown, 2018). They mentioned how people with diverse sexual orientations are treated differently and that education as the potential to change dissonant behaviours. The irony is in a study by Nichols (2017) high school learners showed interested and want to be taught about issues of gender and sexuality diversity. The question may then be asked: why is gender and sexual diversity not taught since that is something that the parents and youth with same-sex sexualities expected the school to do. The Department of Education has developed scripted lessons on sexuality education as part of Life Orientation (DOE, 2019) where aspects of diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations are

discussed. However most recent results shows that teachers are uncomfortable to teach about LGBT issues in class and explain that it is against their religion and culture (Francis, 2019; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaze & Mayeza, 2019).

### 5.3.2THEME 2: EXPERIENCING BEING YOUNG AND WITH A SAME-SEX SEXUALITY- PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON A HETERONORMATIVE AND HETEROSEXIST SCHOOLING SPACE

According to Lee and Bowen (2006) parental involvement in education promotes connections between adults in two of the child's primary microsystems, the home and the school. The narratives from the parents and the same-sex identity youth suggested that teachers and peers are homophobic and dissonance to sexual diversity is tolerated and reproduced within schools. The parents in this study recalled instances and experiences discrimination and violence reported by their children. Kelebogile, for example narrated:

*Kelebogile: "Whenever Neo went to school, I was in a way scared for her safety (transgender female), and was very worried what would happen at school. I wanted her to be happy in school. But I knew... I know kids. The other kids were cruel to her. She told me about it... about the kids in school and how they called her names and things.*

*Susan shared similar memories"*

*Susan: "In the mornings I could see that Gerrie didn't want to school. At times I just wanted to say screw them, I will home-school you. I really think he was scared of the kids... because he told me what the boys did to him. I called the teacher at numerous times who promised that they will speak to the kids in his class. Gerrie asked me not to call anymore because the kids bullied him for reporting it at home. I was helpless."*

*Maleratho explains: "I nearly ended up in jail because I was going to kill a teacher. At one of the primary schools my child attended, I shared in confidence with the leadership about the sexual organs of my child. I explained it all to them because they did not understand. This big issue was with the toilet and that Thami preferred the boys' school*

*uniform. I even told them that I keep it away from my child. My child knew that the 'growth' would go away when she was older, that is what I told her. A teacher secretly told a newspaper that they have a half boy, half girl at their school and they don't know how to deal with it. The story became like a big fire. I had to remove my child from that school. The newspaper and the school compensated us R50 000 and I agreed to let this bad experience be. We needed the money. I felt as if I did something wrong and my child was punished for being born like this. All I wanted for him was a normal life. Besides the battle to have the article removed, the fight about confidential information at schools was what made me tired."*

The narratives from Maleratho aligns with Msibi's (2012) view that schools are unsafe places for young people with non-heterosexual identities and expressions. Maleratho's proactive efforts to inform the school about the intersex development of her child and suggestions on how to respond to it caused major trauma for the parent and her child. Thami became a public sensation and the years of protection was destroyed by one irresponsible teacher with unethical conduct. It caused more difficulties as the mother had to find another school, which resulted in a possible loss of friendship and relationships with certain teachers for Thami. This brings to question how ready schools are to absorb such unusual information within a deep-seated culture of compulsory heteronormativity. From Susan's narrative we notice that the school was not a welcoming environment to her child who in the mornings was aggrieved when preparing for school. Although she thought that informing the teacher was a good idea, the bullying took a new form. The very call to stop the bullying became a tool to the perpetrators of homophobic violence that eventually made the parent to feel helpless. This experience highlights the ineffectiveness of retroactive responses to bullying and violence that emanates from diverse sexual orientations. It also links to the previous theme that quests for teaching and learning of sexual diversity that would perhaps bring about a better understanding. In both Maleratho's and Susan's narratives the question of teacher efficacy to be responsive to issues of sexual diversity is raised. Richardson (2008) as well as Rothman and Simmonds (2015) highlight that schools are found to be ill equipped to address issues of diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations. Many teachers lack training as



Pieterse (2019) reported that Life Orientations lecturers at universities too are uncomfortable and lack the knowledge to equip student teachers with adequate knowledge and skills for the sexuality education classroom. It is therefore not surprising in this study that the schools were not capable to address homophobic bullying and non-hegemonic learner identities. The negative engagement experiences with schools made participating parents to express their wish for *normal* orientating children in order to have the same educational opportunities as their peers. It is important to draw the attention to these experiences with schools constructed a feeling of non-heterosexuality as abnormal and heterosexuality as the desired and ultimate. These narratives further shows that the vilification and discrimination towards non-heterosexual identities in schools were not only felt by these young people but parents too endured trauma. Parents were actively involved in addressing the negative experiences of their children but the dissonant normative systemic culture made them despondent. While parents presented a loving and accepting home environment, it was not clear how parents were supported through these difficulties. The narratives illustrate consistency with the literature that both peers and teachers were the perpetrators of the repressive experiences towards young people with diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions. After decades of reports of schools violence towards diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations (Butler et al, 2003; Brown & Diale, 2017; Francis, 2017; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Msibi, 2012), schools in this study are not only violent and dangerous to non-heterosexual learners but their families too. These values were also echoed with the youth participants. Interestingly there was an alignment between the narratives of the parents and those of their children. The triangulated reports from the child participants aided to the confirmability of the data in this study. The narratives of my youth participants are supported by a study conducted by Butler et al. (2003) who found that all their lesbian and gay participants in South African Secondary schools described their schools, families and churches, and cultures as homophobic, with role models openly condemning gay and lesbian lifestyles. The child participants however did experience their home environment as accepting and a place of warmth, love and safety. Brown (2019) recently found that young people with same-sex sexual orientations feel safe and protected in the home environment when families are affirming and accepting. When



young people did not feel safe and protected at school many performed poorly in their learning while others dropped out (Brown, 2017; Msibi, 2012). It is not surprising to find that three of the child participants in this study dropped out of school. These two significant overlapping ecologies has the potential to positively aid development when in alignment but findings in this study shows the inverse. Richardson (2008) points out that these poignant realities could be ascribed to the high levels of discrimination in South African schools that is strongly patriarchal, heteronormative nature and ridged to transform. It seems also that parents are not known to alternative institutions that could render support to their children as they believed and relied on the school environment to be supportive. The only option was to seek alternative schools. This approach did not always yielded the desired results as many of the public schools are located in homophobic communities (Institute of Race Relations, 2017; The Other Foundation, 2016).

#### SUB-THEME 2.1: SCHOOLS BEING SPACES OF HETERONORMATIVITY AND HETEROSEXISM- PARENTS MOTIVATED TO BECOME INVOLVED IN SCHOOLS

As previously mentioned, parents participants were of the opinion that gender and sexual diverse youth are denied a safe and inclusive schooling experience. All of my child participants' were "out" or "outed" in school and this was verified by both the parents and their children. Two of the youth participants narrated that they rather felt "safe" at home, because of the victimisation at school especially with the derogative language and name calling. All of my youth participants described their parents as accepting and a source of protection. The victimisation of the youth ranged from verbal to physical harassment and encounters. On discussing the lives of their children being "out" in school, all the participants were able to mention at least one incident of discrimination against their child based on his or her sexuality. The parents shared the narratives below:

*Kelebogile: "her (the transgender female) life in school was tough. They found her strange and told her so. The whole issue of it is a boy and not a girl was there... she was placed under the girl category and not the boys. My daughter told me that she was verbally abused based on her sexuality, but never mentioned anything, luckily*

*never physical”.*

Kelebogile’s daughter however did share an incident of a physical assault, but decided not to tell her mother about it. She was concerned of the reaction of the mother and then the effects later at school. Another parent, when asked whether she knew about incidences of discrimination or victimisation of her child due to his sexuality, she shared:

*Nonkululeko: “we suspected that school were tough because we knew he would be bullied because he was gay. Only when we engaged with him about bullying he told us about the bullying and teasing because he was gay. It wasn’t something a parent wanted to hear. Our son also told us that the teachers and the school knew about the bullying, but they didn’t do anything. Everyone was against him. There was no one he felt safe enough with to go talk about this. He was scared”.*

*Gomolemo: “Kamo was very upset that he was part of the girls’ side of the class register. When the teacher did attendance she would first call the girls and then the boys. Whenever his name was called from the girls’ side the whole class would laugh. I addressed the matter with the principal and it was agreed that the teacher would use the class list that was alphabetically arranged. It eased of the discomfort and teasing.”*

## SUB-THEME 2.2: THE CONSEQUENCES OF EMBRACING YOUR SAME- SEX SEXUALITY AND BEING IN SCHOOL- THE EXPERIENCES AND SUPPORT OF THE PARENTS

On a psychological level, Richardson (2008) and Ryan and Gruskin (2006) highlights the consequences that youth with same-sex sexual orientations experience which ranges from loneliness, isolation, identity crises, depression, high levels of anxiety, stress, and self-hatred. As mentioned in the literature review (Institute of Race Relations, 2017; The Other Foundation, 2016), these findings further illustrates how in South Africa, gendered violence, experienced through heteronormativity in society and in school has become common, with forms of curative rape and physical assault towards lesbian women and gay men. One of the mothers recalled an incident shared by her daughter. When I asked if her daughter was ever discriminated against or

victimised due to her non-heterosexual orientation she responded:

*Maria: "There was a boy who hit her (Wanda) because she was gay. It was when she was in grade 11. I know there are people who has a problem with it and it has always been one of my greatest concerns. Especially men who can't accept gay woman. They get aggressive towards gay woman". As a parent I was always worried what the experience of my child was on a daily basis. I could hardly concentrate at work. When you hurt my child you hurt me."*

In addition to Wanda's experience, another two of my child participants recalled physical instances. Neo for example shared:

*Neo: "There was this one occasion I can recall where it got physical. A guy pushed me against the wall and asked me why I chose to be a faggot. He kept on asking. It was quite scary for me. I was scared to tell my parents because I knew a war would break out".*

The hostile environment had negative impacts on the well-being and academic performance of sexual and gender minority learners. Heterosexist and homophobic language, specifically derogative terms, were direct and intentionally harmful towards the youth participants as well as the parents. Although the youth participants had the support from the parents, the repercussions of reporting violent school incidents at home made them to withhold certain information. This shows the impact when home and school is not in alignment in producing a climate of care and support for all learners. Issues related to verbal abuse were prominent in the data since four of the youth participants' experienced verbal abuse on a daily basis. It seemed that youth participants were comfortable this "less violent" incident compared to physical assault. Gerrie and Neo for example shared:

*Gerrie: "They called me names such as mofgat and faggot. There were many different ones" I use to tell me mom in the beginning but I later got used to it and ignored it.*

*Neo: "I was called names. Many such as gay, isitabane, moffie". When I told the teachers about it then they would say I should ignore the silly kids. My parents went to the school many times about these issues. I was later teased because I was a cry baby at home. I stopped reporting it at home because I knew my parents would come to the school.*

Three of the mothers also narrated that their children were called names at school due to his or her expressions. Common derogatory references were "faggot", "moffie" and "istibane". These narratives just highlights the realities and struggles of learners in schools who embody sexual and gender diversity identities and who is facing exclusion and inequality and the challenges of parents to fight for equal treatment of their children. Ironically that male youth and female youth had different experiences, even though they were all victimized and discriminated against. For example, parents pointed out that their sons felt safer with girls compared to other boys. They narrated that their sons were scared to go to schools because of the other "boys". In their accounts of the events surrounding this "safety" element, parents were aware that their sons went to the "girls" bathrooms during break time out of fear of being bullied. Three of the parents made references to bathroom experiences:

*Nonkululeko: "My son never felt comfortable going to the boys' bathrooms. He went to the girls bathrooms. He told me that he was scared and that if he went to the boy's bathrooms they would close the doors and hit him or something".*

*Kelebogile: "He always went to the girls bathrooms because he knew he would be bullied. He didn't know what would happen. He felt more comfortable with the girls. He felt safe and protected".*

*Maleratho: "The incident never really left my child. You know how gossip is, it travels. Whenever Thami would use the male bathroom the boys would peep over the walls of the bathroom cubical with the hope to see if the rumor was true. Thami stopped having water or juice so that he just would not use the bathroom at school. This strategy became*

*a bladder problem later. It was exhausting. It was one thing after the other.”*

Schools have an obligation to create safe and supporting learning environments for all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Horn, Szalacha & Drill, 2008). Another male youth participant narrated:

*Gerrie; “There was this one situation that upset me a lot. I was in grade 11. On the first day when the teacher placed us according to the class list, the one boy refused to sit next to me and told the teacher that he is going to catch something, like AIDS or an STI from me since I am a moffie. That was one of the worst days of my life....The teacher moved me to sit next to a girl. I felt embarrassed since the teacher took his (the other boy) side. I did not want my mom to be upset again on the first day of school. I let it slide. I told her much later and she was furious.”*

Teachers would rather diffuse the situation instead of dealing with the root cause of homophobic incidents. Again, this points to the concern that teachers did not have strategies to address homophobia in schools. Hence there engagement with parents to address aspects of homophobic violence were also superfluous. The intersection of their children's wish of not responding and that of parental instinct do address the matter is very challenging for parents. Often parents had to let go of opportunities to engage with schools simply because of their children's plea and the inadequacy of the response. Consistent parental responses to homophobic bullying and violence was often experienced by the children as embarrassing.

While schools ideally are sites of care and support, Gerrie's teacher's unresponsiveness produced a message of exclusion and humiliation. The mother could not address the matter due to Gerrie's choice of not reporting it at home to avoid further conflict and torment. As a result homophobic violence and bullying remains unresolved issues in many schools and missed opportunities for parents to intervene. The bigger message is that the retroactive response to homophobic violence and bullying in all these incidents is in no uncertainty an ineffective approach.

### 5.3.3THEME 3. : THE IMPACT OF REPRESSIVE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENTS.

The ethos of inclusive education in this study is a far-reaching ideal considering the levels of denial and discrimination of gender and sexuality diversity which resulted in violence, compromised wellbeing and loss of learning opportunity.

The many reports of homophobic violence and bullying by parents provided schools with a crucial opportunity to create a platform for open dialogue and critique about the meaning of sexuality and gender equality. At the same time offered schools to strengthen the notion of parental involvement. The parents' views on the nature of school involvement as a result of homophobic bullying were the following:

*Susan: "I was disappointed and angry. I expect a teacher to be compassionate and look out for my child. This didn't happen. They ignored him".*

*Kelebogile: "They didn't protect Neo the way they should. I thought to myself, what if it was your child being called names and humiliated in front of other children. Would you still do nothing about it?"*

*Maleratho: "I thought this is the new South Africa where we respect all people. It was not the case with Thami. When he came from school sad, we all felt it home. I just wanted the school years to end because it became too much. He dropped out, it was painful but we accepted it. This is what school did to my child and my family."*

There is substantial evidence which suggests that parental involvement in the education of their children can make a significant difference in the educational attainment of these children (Lemmer, 2009; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013). The schools' unresponsiveness to homophobic bullying and violence caused the schooling and subsequent life opportunities for some of the participants. This was despite parental intervention. The only times when parental involvement was actively sought was when their children retaliated the bullying and experience academic failure.

*Maria: "The principal started off by saying that Wanda is causing problems at school and*



*that her behaviour is unacceptable. I asked him what she did wrong and he said that she makes trouble in class by not doing her homework or handing in her assessments on time. He also said that her teachers reported that her marks are dropping drastically and said that I must talk to her. I then asked whether he was aware that she was bullied in school and he replied that he did not receive any such reports from the teachers. He promised to look into it...*

Wanda was one of the youth participants who “dropped” out of school. Similarly, Nonkululeko also had a meeting with the principal. She recalls the fact that the principal never brought up the topic of the bullying:

*Nonkululeko: “We spoke, or actually he spoke and I listened. He said he received complaints that Tsepiso goes to the girls’ bathrooms. He said it is not safe for the other girls and that it is against the school policy. I then told him that Tsepiso was gay and that he didn’t feel safe going to the boys’ toilets because of the constant bullying. He said he wasn’t aware of any harassment, but he is not allowed to go to the female bathrooms under any circumstances.*

Ironically in most of the meetings the principal (all the principals were male) focused on the “child” as rebellious and not following the school policy. What is also significant is that the parents mentioned the fact that their child was bullied because of his same-sex sexual orientation, but the principals ignored that aspect. Despite teachers knowledge about the victimisation and harassment at school they did nothing to assist the child.

The parents however mentioned these obstacles and narrated that this partnership could not realise without the acknowledgement of the value they bring through their involvement. Nor could it work without the holistic acceptance of the children as equal to their heteronormative peers. Both entities will have to work together and share the same goal and aspirations for the children in their care. Active perpetuation and reproduction of gender culture in schools that support heterosexuality and constructs homosexuality as something that must remain hidden (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012; Wilmot &



Naidoo, 2014) led to the neglect of these parents and their children. Susan mentioned that her son, Gerrie, started acting out and being rebellious. They didn't know what was happening. They mentioned a case which was really upsetting to them.

*Susan: "There was this one incident at school where he sent another boy a sexual message and the other boy's father got to know about it. The words that he used was a shock and abnormal to us. Like one thing I would never forget is that he said he wanted to suck his dick and lick his balls".*

The current study found that parents deeply cared and wanted to get involved in education of their children. Susan shared that they were called for a meeting regarding Gerrie's 'rebellious' and 'embarrassing' behaviour at school. The principal never addressed the homophobic bullying or victimisation of their child. In addition, the message from Gerrie took center stage. This letter has much to do with normal puberty and sexual development as young people are sexual beings (Chaskalso, Bhana, Brouard, Hodes, Ngabaza, Silbert & Zungu, 2019). Considering the heteronormative school culture, even sex education in schools that is responsive to LGBTI school youth is hidden and silent (Elia & Eliason, 2010). More so, sex education is riddled with deficit messaging of diseases, teenage pregnancies and abstinence (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). What Gerrie is expressing is a natural inclination to desire and pleasure associated with his sexual orientation. Both parents and school will have to acknowledge him as not only a cognitive object but a sexual being as explained by Carboni & Bhana (2019). Sexual desires are natural to school aged youth but it is evident that both parents and schools have not yet considered learning opportunities for sex education that would be responsive to Gerrie's needs, hence the alarm. Often parents and schools see children as sexually innocent (Bhana, 2007) and are less likely to engage with the topic, more so they are unlikely if not uncomfortable to address non-heterosexual sex education (Elia & Eliason, 2010). Even this so-called embarrassing moment was a lost opportunity for learning for both school and parents. Another parent echoed the "behavioural problems" which caused the school to request for a meeting.

*Nonkululeko: "We did receive calls from the school to come see them. There were fights at school which he was involved in. He was not aggressive at home at all. But they (the school) never said anything that it might be due to something to do with his sexuality or anything... Only when we engaged him (her son), he informed us that it was due to the other kids bullying him because he was gay and that he was called names. He said the teachers knew about this. The school never told us anything about this".*

The findings suggests that the sexual minority youth experience lower levels of wellbeing because they receive less support at school compared to that of their heterosexual peers. The parents of these school youth demonstrated a willing attitude to form a home-school partnership to establish an enabling learning environment for all children. Schools however responded only when same-sex identity school youth retaliated against the unresponsive homophobic school environment. Whilst schools could have seized the opportunity to address issues of sexuality and its implications it opted to focused only traditional concerns such as school fights and poor academic performances without conducting thorough investigations. This illustrates the inadequacy, discomfort and unwillingness of schools to address the issues of sexual diversity, more so the inability to forge a partnership with parents to collectively attend to pertinent issues of inclusion, learner wellbeing, care and support. As a result parents have lost hope in the notion home-school partnerships that would facilitate a safe and inclusive environment for their children. The despondence resorted that young people dropped out of school and parents did not stop them from doing so. For these parents, schools showed no interest to create a welcoming environment for their children. From a policy perspective, the South African educational system is perceived as inclusive, with a strong emphasis on national unity whilst recognising cultural diversity and the individual rights of every learner. Yet, the day-to-day realities for South African same-sex sexuality school youth are still subjected to homophobic attitudes and actions perpetrated by peers and teachers. The missed opportunity for praxis has cost the future life opportunities for some of the participating school youth and parents who have lost faith in schools that would accommodate learners across diverse identities, in this case sexual orientation.

### SUB-THEME 3.1: CHANGING SCHOOLS AS THE ONLY REMEDY TO HOMOPHOBIA.

The extracts below shows how heteronormative and heterosexist bullying affected the youth participants' academic and psychosocial wellbeing. Due to the constant victimization and bullying of their child, all of my parents felt the need to move them to another school. It also highlights the limited responses participating parents had in addressing these unpleasant experiences. Most parents moved their child to another school at least once as can be traced in the narratives below.

*Nonkululeko: "After meeting with the school, and me explaining the bullying, nothing changed. The bullying continued. I thought by moving my child might make the situation better. We were trying to protect him, from being bullied and discrimination and treated differently. He was in 3 different high schools. Now we realize it wasn't the answer to the problem. Maybe it made things worse for him. He wasn't happy at any of them".*

*Susan: "We took him to a school where no one knew him. We thought it would help, but then they found out that he was gay... they started teasing him again. He did very badly in school and we knew that he was a very smart boy. He couldn't handle it anymore and landed up in a psychiatric institution for three weeks. We then considered home-schooling, but he refused and from there he refused to be taught at all. He left school in grade 11. Now he does lose jobs and totally dependent on us".*

*Maria: "She (Wanda) is highly intelligent and got merit awards for subjects such as mathematics and science...that was when she was still on the right track. And then suddenly she started failing all of her subjects. To the extent that she decided to drop out of the school and is now a waitress".*

*Gomolemo: "The incident at school with the teacher and the newspaper left Kamo with so many scars. He was never the same in school again. He became an angry, violent and short tempered person. The gossip about Kamo's private parts followed him to his new school. Kamo was constantly in fights the moment anyone at school would make*

*comments about his private parts. The continuous trouble got him suspended several times and he eventually dropped out. The school did not help with counselling services and we did not have the money to send him to private services.”*

The youth participants shared contrary experiences with their move to another school. They pointed out that it affected their academic performance as well as their emotional well-being since the bullying didn't stop. This underscores that homophobic bullying and violence being endemic in schools and that other expressions that heterosexuality across the board is not tolerated. It further motivates promotion of a partnership between the parents and the school to create an inclusive environment for diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations. The youth participants for example responded as follows:

*Tsepiso: Moving me to another school, this never really helped at all. It affected me psychologically like for example maybe in the previous school they would have done something. I would also fall behind with my academics. I know I could have done better if they left me alone.*

*Thami: “I was just tired of fighting about school uniform all the time. I had to explain over and over how a dress made me feel. It will become a big issue of who I am and why I am. I got tired of bringing my mom to school all the time. I wanted to learn not fight about who I am.”*

Three of the child participants dropped out of school due to the fact that they could not either deal with the bullying, the impact thereof or forced to conform the norm of heterosexuality which they refused to do.

*Gerrie: “At first it was fine, but then it started again, the name calling, the moffie thing. I just tried to ignore them. But at night I would cry...I just couldn't finish it because I wasn't psychologically strong enough. I couldn't see myself struggle in silence for another year. I couldn't face it. I would rather have died”.*

Tsipiso's parents moved him three times during high school. However, Tsipiso also

mentioned that he struggled and his academic performance suffered:

*Tsepiso: "Moving me to another school, but this never really helped at all. It affected me psychologically like for example maybe in the previous school they would have done something. I would also fall behind with my academics and get lower marks..."*

One of the other mothers took her child out of the township school. She thought that the area might be the problem. She took him to a school closer to the urban areas. As with the other participants, the bullying continued. In fact, according to Neo, it was worst.

*Neo: "I was called names such as Haf, Isitabane, Moffie, and Gogoni. I was in a new school. I knew no one. I lost my buddies from the old school and felt hated in the new school. I think it would have been better if I just stayed at my previous one".*

From the narratives of the youth, moving them to another school did not make a difference. It needs to be noted that the parents took their same-sex sexuality children out of the school after unsuccessful meetings with the former schools. This is a direct result of parents who did not receive quality engagement with schools to change the bullying towards their children. More so, the parents did not have a lot of support systems to address the challenges their children were experiencing. What seem to be a mistake in the eyes of the children was a desperate effort from parents to provide a better schooling environment.

### SUB-THEME 3.2: COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE HOME AND THE SCHOOL.

According to Epstein (2009), parents want their children to succeed in school and in order for them to be good partners in their children's education; they yearn to obtain more information and communication from schools since schools are microcosms of society. Understanding oppression in schools, as the data from the parents and youth supported, requires examining the relationship between schools and other institutions and cultural ideas. This emphasises the importance of an open channel for dialogue between the parents and the school In order to enable a positive learning environment

for the same-sex sexuality youth.

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense that their children have been involved with at least one bullying incident at the school. In all six cases, the school have been in contact with the parents. Although parents were actively engaging the school to report and address the bullying experienced by their child, the schools presented a sense of unwillingness to address the concerns. Parents argued that if there was open and honest dialogue or models for communication between them as the parents and the school, it would have had a positive impact on their child's holistic wellbeing. Thus, they yearned communication from the school. For example, some of the interviewees said the following:

*Maria: "I tell you, if there were problems at school, especially when it comes to bullying of my child... any parent would want to be involved and informed."*

*Susan: "I just think that we (parents) should be made aware and that they would communicate things to us before it is too late..."*

I hold the view the home-school communication should not only focus on the academic performance but on psychosocial well-being and identity development, in this case, for same-sex sexuality school youth. Research has suggested that the extent of parental involvement depends, among other things, on how frequently the school approaches parents (Glasgow & Whitney, 2009). Despite the statutory and policy protection schools remain unsafe and discriminatory spaces for same-sex sexual orientation youth (Francis, 2013; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Msibi, 2012). In this study we have learned that parents of children with same-sex sexual orientations are equally less validated and responded to in the schooling environment. School communication with parents still takes a deficit and retroactive form. Schools ignore the negative experiences faced by same-sex sexual orientations youth. Even when parents proactively engage with schools regarding matters of sexual diversity, the school either is incompetent, unwilling or blatantly refuse to address the matter. Parents seem not to be familiar of their rights of active involvement in school functioning and hence have not always demanded for



positive results. It is also not clear what alternative options have when they are not satisfied when schools are yielding the desired response. Although policies do prohibit discrimination in all forms, the silence of specific reference to sexual orientation may contribute the unresponsiveness. The data also showed that the power dynamics with parents in the school geography certainly influence the nature communication. The only power parents thought they had was the ownership over the children and unsatisfactory communication resorted to the decision to remove the child. Although the aim of parents was to seek a better schooling environment, the broader challenge is that homophobic violence and bullying, heteronormativity and heterosexism remains unchallenged in the former schools. Parental involvement in the acclaimed inclusive schooling environment for learners with same-sex sexual orientation is a matter that needs open and wider consultation. As South Africa and the Department of Education makes various efforts to create a welcoming environment for diverse sexual orientations in schools (Chaskalson et al, 2019) the critical notion of parent involvement should not be left behind.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter analysed and discussed the findings. The data shows that parents were aware of the same-sex sexual orientations from an early age and have proactively engaged with schools to address possible challenges that may emanate from this reality. Schools however promised to respond to the concerns but showed little commitment. Most parents became despondent and resorted to desperate measures such as seeking enrolment at alternative schools with the hope that the homophobic bullying would stop. Unfortunately experiences of violence and homophobia continued in the new schools and their children dropped out. In retrospect, children did not drop out but were dropped by the unresponsiveness of the school. Hopelessness on the side of parents made them reluctant to prevent their children from ultimately leaving the schooling system prematurely. Data shows that schools were inadequate in their responses and unwilling to address reported homophobic bullying regardless of parental engagement. Most of the schools failed to build home-school partnerships to address the holistic needs of learners with same-sex sexual orientations.



## **CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

### **6.1 SUMMARY OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1 provided an orientation of the study and background to the research; the primary and secondary research questions and the objective of the research. The first chapter indicated the need for a home-school partnership to facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments for school youth with same-sex sexual orientations. The need for this study emanated from the heteronormative and heterosexist schooling space that impacts the psychosocial and academic development of a children with diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations. It was not certain how parents who affirm and embrace the same-sex sexual orientation of their children engage with schools to address repressive and homophobic experiences. The notion of parental involvement is a mandatory approach in the South African schooling system. This study was concern how parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their children, often in the minority, will use the right to involvement the education would facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments.

Chapter 2 presented the reviewed literature in terms of the aims of the study and the research questions. Parental involvement and experiences with schools regarding their same-sex sexuality children were the guiding principles. Although there is an emerging body of literature on school experiences for learners with same-sex sexual orientations, this study could not locate research that address parental involvement for this cohort of learners. The overarching theme of parental involvement in school as a rather academic inclination and in some incidents references to bullying in general. There is a need for research that explore parental involvement that address aspects of sexual diversity in schools as this is a constitutional protection in South Africa. Lastly, policies and legislation and the disjuncture there of in practice in relation to the teaching and learning of gender and sexual diversity were reviewed and discussed. The existing literature shows effective guidelines on inclusion and the prohibition of discrimination but the mere silence of the term sexuality in these documents could cause the neglect in schools.

Chapter 3 I focused on the theoretical framework underpinning this study. This chapter discussed Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological model in relation to sexual and gender diversity specifically in the South African context and internationally in general. The dissonance towards sexual diversity is strongly embedded in systemic responses which is deeply rooted in histories of difference and othering. This chapter demonstrates the overlap of responses to sexual diversity in the various ecologies and the direct impact it has in the schooling system.

Chapter 4 presented an in-depth account of the research design and methodology used in conducting this study. An outline of the research methodology, followed by a discussion of the philosophical paradigm for this study. An interpretive paradigm was used because it reflects the recognition of the subjective understanding of participants' own understanding of their experience and the need to interpret it. Data collection techniques were outlined and discussed. Furthermore, issues of trustworthiness were discussed as well as the ethical considerations that directed the study. This also chapter addressed the various challenges faced with recruitment of suitable participants and the manner in which it was resolved. It cast light on research considerations with populations with sensitive associations.

Chapter 5 highlighted the results of the study in terms of findings from the data that was collected through semi-structured interviews. The findings were discussed in relation to the reviewed literature and the rationale of the study. The themes generated were explored in relation to my research questions. It highlights the complexity of parental involvement for a cohort that is in the minority and the attitudes and responses when schools do not value certain expressions and identities.

In Chapter 6 a synopsis of the preceding chapters is presented. In this chapter a framework for a home-school partnership was conceptualized. The limitations were mentioned, recommendations for future research were listed and the chapter was concluded with a section on self-reflection.

## **6.2 CONCEPTIALIZATION OF A HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK**

A Home-School Partnership is supported by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model in

that the relationship between the parents and the school are not only present in the microsystem, but are also influenced by other factors such as policies, legislation and the education system existing in the exosystem. The design and implementation of this home-school partnership framework creates a way to enable an inclusive and safe learning space for the same-sex sexuality youth who are not provided with the same learning and agency opportunities as that of their heterosexual peers. It was noted from the literature review, as well as the findings from this study that there are conflicting interests between the attitudes towards the same-sex sexual orientation youth, the school and the parents resulting towards a hostile schooling space for this minority group of young people. It was clear that from the parents that a collaborative effort will lead to a home-school partnership, developing to a joint effort and responsibility to improve the quality of the lives of the same-sex sexuality youth in schools. This conceptual framework therefore looks at the relationship between the parents and the school, and the integration of effective communication and the implementation of policy and legislation. As with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, the youth remains the focus of the model. The following figure illustrates a suggestion concerning how a home-school partnership can be conceptualized. The figure shows how the integration of the two micro- systems may be applied to enhance the relationship between the parents and the school.

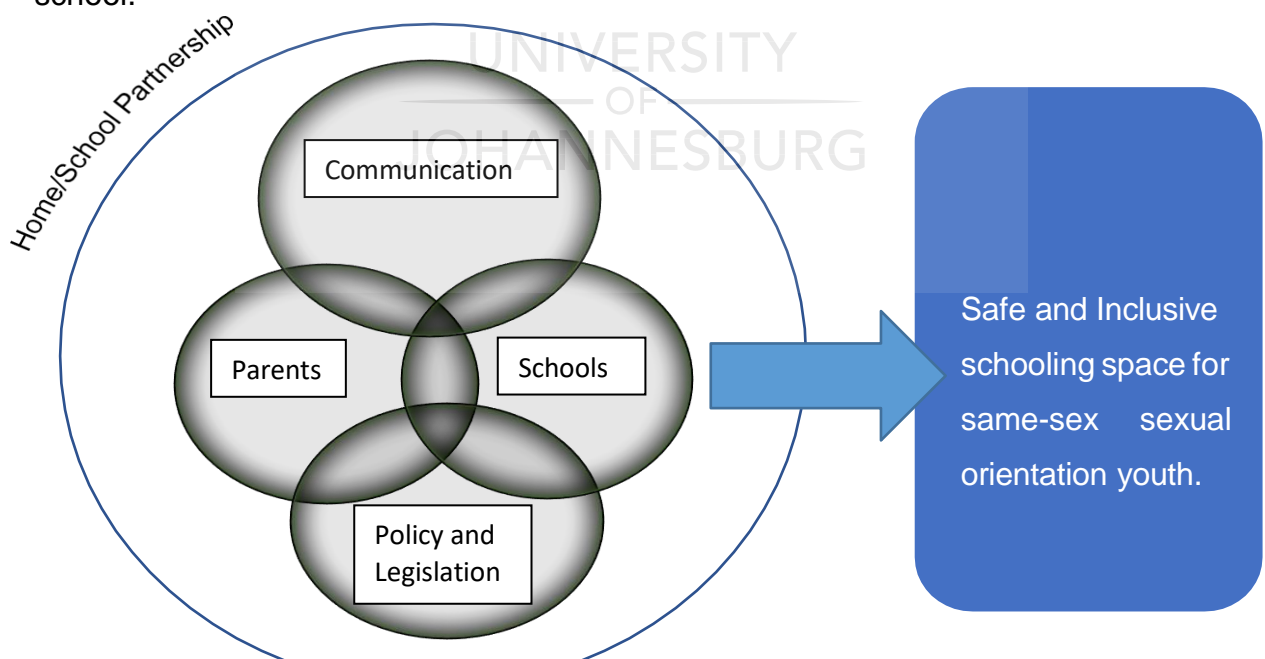


Figure 6.1: Home-School Partnership Framework

The framework assumes that a common mission towards equal educational opportunities for all youth requires collaboration between parents and school. Schools will have to boldly declare their commitment to render quality education to all learners regardless of background. This commitment should be linked to values of respect for diversity and embrace. I hold the view that a celebration of diversity could foster true partnership based on collegiality and mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents and the school. It will potentially undo the falsified belief that all parents hold the same value and the approach to parental involvement as one dimensional. Collaboration and communication have been identified as effective strategies for active parental involvement in schools. Collaboration for this study is seen as a process in which parents with diverse perspectives, backgrounds and approaches are invited to enrich the teaching and learning environment and mutually contribute solutions to the myriad of issues found in schools. Therefore, there must be open and mutually respectful communication channels between schools and parents to counteract miscommunication. To avoid notions of imbalanced power dynamics, schools with policies have to read their own home-school policy that considers national frameworks but that is responsive the dynamics of the communities that is located in. This is to respect and affirm the various qualities and characteristics of its immediate clients. This validation could enhance parental participation when diversity is acknowledged and appreciated. Home and school communication should mutually agreed and developed upon for all entities to take ownership and responsibility for what has been agreed upon. I belief it has the potential to lessen the unequal power dynamics as seen in this study.

In this framework, communication is an essential condition for effective collaboration. Collaboration also implies joint decision-making amongst all relevant stakeholders and involving all parties. Appropriate decisions can be taken only if everyone has sufficient information at their disposal. As seen from the narratives of the parents, they perceived that effective communication skills and processes are essential in schools that reflect South Africa's multi-cultural society. Throughout the discussion of the framework, I continuously referred back to the policies and legislation that exist in

South Africa and how they can be utilized in making such a home-school partnership possible. As illustrated in the conceptual framework below, there are four elements: the parents, policy and legislation, communication and the schools. The elements will now be unpacked.

#### 6.2.1 THE PARENTS AND THE NEED FOR COMMUNICATION

My research argues that to effectively involve parents of diverse views and backgrounds in the affairs of the school, as well as in their education, certain strategies must be promoted and popularized within the school community. Strategies for involvement are effective when parents themselves are effective when they are aware of such strategies. Parents need to understand all aspects of involvement which are available within their child's school in order to become fully engaged. Opportunities should actively be created through workshops to acquaint parents and schools with the most effective strategies for ensuring home-school relations. This involvement is capable of strengthening the home-school relationship. Schools must become places where parental contributions are valued to enhance teaching and learning. A welcoming atmosphere requires more than just the rhetoric of policies and legislation. Activities to involve families should consider the pressures of contemporary domestic life, should be feasible to implement and equitable to all types of families. To promote effective home-school communication, schools should establish regular two-way communication with all about school programmes and children's progress.

The school should create certain channels to assess all parent opinions on a regular basis and gather informal suggestions. It is also a recommendation that each school through the SGB's explore how the diverse voice of the various entities are captured and valued. This system will be geared to resolved practical issues, making short-to-medium-term improvements and providing frequent reports to have a holistic understanding of the needs of all. Decentralisation of parents' involvement to grade level will work well. A suggestion would be to appoint a parent representative/s for each class or grade. This might be effective, for the case of my study since the SGB presentative will not necessarily provide an answer to my research objective, but it may create

parent involvement of the same-sex sexual orientation youth to present their opinions in smaller groups which will then be presented to the SGB. It is important that teachers become responsive to the various psychosocial challenges that emanate from the hidden curriculum.

A genuine partnership with parents requires a substantial change in teacher attitudes and practices. An in-service training and support programme should include the development of communication skills and other aspects of home-school relationships. This can be achieved by workshops being arranged and facilitated for parents by the Department of Education (DoE). The essence of such a workshop should include a practical and experimental component in which teachers and parents share their knowledge and skills, not only in planning, but also in carrying out a programme of teaching. Workshops can create opportunities for parents to raise a wide range of issues and concerns and to make social contacts. Schools and parents can develop strategies to address bullying and to include topics of gender and sexuality, thereby relaying the message that this harassment or policing of topics is unacceptable (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). In addition to feeling unprepared or unable to address these issues of gender and sexuality in schools, educators face the reality of today's pressure in schools, school demographics are shifting and the needs of students have become complex.

For schools to forge a genuine partnership with parents than they will have to consider means to empower parents on the various policies such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (DoJ, 1996) and the South African Schools Act (SASA) Act, No.84 of 1996 (DOE, 1996b). If the various stakeholders have an understanding of than these policies could be optimally engaged with, understood and implemented to facilitate a safe and inclusive schooling space that caters for all learners and more specifically school youth with same-sex sexual orientations.

In many countries, including South Africa, one of the strongest trends in education reform has been to give parents, and in some cases community members, an increased role in governing schools (Lemmer, 2007). Parental involvement in education has now assumed a mandatory form in South Africa as a result of the greater democratization of education in this country (DOE, 1996b). There is a need for policy



guidelines for schools and teacher to ensure that learners with diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations are adequately catered for (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2017). These guidelines should explicitly point out how to engage with parents. Some parents are not supportive of the diverse sexual orientations expressed with their children, while others do. Teachers ought to know how to handle such sensitivities.

#### **6.2.2 POLICIES IN PLACE SUPPORTING A HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

Fields and Payne (2016) ask how attention to schooling might broaden our analysis of the many lessons about gender and sexuality circulating in contemporary schools beyond policy, curriculum, and pedagogy. Clearly, there is a need to deepen an understanding of schooling, especially as it pertains to make critical connections among anti-heterosexism, teaching, learning, and learner support.

Richardson (2008) for example writes about his experience of addressing principals in Gauteng on how to make schools lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender LGBT-friendly. He reports that many of the principals acknowledged that they had the chance to discuss lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) issues in education, and many felt that in spite of South Africa's progressive Constitution, schools were not yet ready to deal openly with non-normative sexualities. Educational policies are often vague and not sufficiently prescriptive as seen in the Life Orientation (LO) subject included in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011). This free interpretation of the Curriculum guidelines is compounded by the lack of critical monitoring of educator compliance by policy. This has resulted in the mandate of teaching being influenced by individual educators' morals and beliefs. The school governing body (SGB) has the potential to enforce the school to be responsiveness to major policies and objectives in education that aims at creating inclusive learning environments.

### **6.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND ANSWERING OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The three research questions informed my studies. The focus was on parents of children with same-sex sexual orientations and their engagement with schools to foster safe, inclusive and enabling learning environments. The findings from the study as explained



in chapter five responded to my three research questions as outlined in a summary below.

1. How do parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their children, experience involvement in their child's school?

All of my data that was collected from the parents concluded that they were aware of instances of bullying or discrimination taking place due to their child's non- heterosexual orientation. What was alarming was that there was also cases where the teachers cognizant of homophobic bullying and violence but did not respond. All participating parents engaged with the respective schools regarding their child's school experiences. School initiated "interaction" or meetings were called by the principal regarding their same-sex sexuality children's behavioral problems experienced by the teachers. The schools never explored the intersections behavior in relation to homophobic bullying or discriminated. The parents expressed that the school related verbal and/or physical violence on the basis of sexual orientation had an impact on the learning and wellbeing of their children which in many instances affected the family as a whole. The only strategies parents had to support their children was to move their children to others schools.

2. What do parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientation of their child expect from schools to create a safe and inclusive learning environment?

All of my parents expected the school to present a caring environment that creates a safe and inclusive learning space, equal for all learners. They also suggested that they want the school to educate the learners, regardless of their sexuality, about gender and sexual diversity as a means to reduce bullying and violence. Parents also expected schools to actively engage with the topic gender and sexual discrimination. The anticipated schools to have policies and guidelines to combat such issues. This however was not the case.

3. What are the needs of parents who affirm the same-sex sexual orientations to

establish a home-school partnership?

Parents wished to have had open and accurate information regarding the well-being of their child. Even though they mentioned that there was communication between the schools and themselves, it did not lead to any successful results for their children with same-sex sexualities. The parents wanted to know to be informed and made part of the solution, and not having to face the consequences such as bad behavior by themselves. Parents expressed a need to collaborate as equal partners to ensure a safe and inclusive schooling space for their children. They acknowledged the importance of a partnership between themselves as the parents and the school.

#### **6.4 CONTRIBUTION TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Studies on parental involvement largely focus on aspects of learning and school improvement. The major contribution is the angle of sexual orientation which is a contentious, silent and sensitive topic in the school environment. This study highlights need to engage with a key stakeholder, parents, to facilitate the holistic agency of children with the school environment. Emerging studies in South Africa mainly focus on teachers and learners towards a discourse of sexual and gender diversity in the school system. This research widens the discourse towards parents to ensure that care and support for children and development is cared for in various ecologies that the child navigates. This study further highlights that aspects of inclusive education needs to broaden from notions of learning difficulties and disabilities to all aspects that impact learning. Another contribution is the awareness that there is a parent cohort who are comfortable and affirming of sexual diversity. This is alternative to the view that the older generations lack understanding and are unwilling to accept and engage with aspects such as LGBTI. This study emphasized the importance of a collaboration between the two closest spaces in which the youth lives in; the home and the school. What is significant is that, by making use of Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological model, other factors or ecologies were also taken into account in enabling a safe and inclusive schooling space for the non-heterosexual youth.

## 6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study recommends:

- The area of sexuality education in the human rights discourse must be further explored in order to identify the point of mediation between policy and practice. This study still present challenges similar to findings from research conducted two decades ago. There is a need to explore the unwillingness of school environments to create an inclusive learning environment regardless of sexual orientation.
- Power dynamics in home-school partnership presents the quality of parental engagements with schools. Research will have to explore how parents in general experience school engagement. Research should further explore how power can be distributed between parents and schools to ensure that both parties are equally valued and validated;
- This study discovered that the notion of parents is often treated as a one dimension and a unified voice. Research on how the SGB records and represents the diverse views and voices of parents are to explored ;
- Develop a strategy to assist schools on how to formulate their own models to implement anti-bullying policies and practices.



## 6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Participants in this study all resided in the Province of the Free State and Gauteng, South Africa. Therefore, their views and understanding reflected in this study are their own experiences and positioning.

The study on the experiences of parents who accepted their child's same-sex sexual orientation and the school involvement presents a nuance to inclusive practices of schooling for all. Although parents and their children's views were considered, I belief that the views of teachers, principals and support staff on parental involvement towards the

inclusivity of learners with same-sex sexual orientations could have enhance the study. This certainly creates an opportunity for further research.

Considering the limitations mentioned above, there was a commitment to strengthen the study beyond the existing limitations and one way of doing so was the use of snowball sampling. In order to address subjectivity, I used a reflective journal from time-to-time during the course of the study: This was done to avoid subjectivity and interference with the experiences of the participants. Another way was also the use of semi-structured interviews which gave the participants the opportunity to engage freely in the conversations about their experiences. I also interacted with the participants after transcribing and gave them the opportunity to see whether the transcripts represented their views, thus strengthened the trustworthiness of the study.

## **6.7 REFLECTIONS**

Whose responsibility is it to support troubled same-sex sexual orientation youth in schools? From the start of this endeavor, I knew that I would not be able to dissociate myself with this study and be objective. In fact, I embraced it. As explained in chapter 2, this study was not just to obtain a PhD. It was a journey where I searched for answers myself. There were times during the interviews and conversations with my participants that I was troubled with all the experiences I had while being in high school. I wanted to know what could have happened if my parents and school worked together to help me as a “child” with a same-sex sexual orientation. I felt my participants’ sense of helplessness and sorrow. I was able to relate to the youth I interviewed in how they tried to pretend to be “straight” in school. The parents I interviewed wanted to see their children happy and succeed in schools. The parents, as with my own mother, realised that schools are heteronormative and heterosexist sites and lacked strategies to respond to homophobic bullying and violence. My mother, out of concern, tried to intervene and help me as a young gay child, but received no support from the school. In fact, she was ignored and the homophobic bullying continued. What was of significance to me as an adult two decades later and researcher is that these poignant realities are still present in schools and cost the learning opportunities for many young people.

The discourse of parental involvement in relation to sexual orientation is certainly at its infancy stage and much more research is necessary to develop it. The bodies that are educated in classrooms need more than cognitive stimulation but there diverse needs to become the best development are to be considered. Parents and schools have a collective responsibility to ensure that young people in their care become fully functional agents within the different ecologies. Parents and teachers are the key adults in the life of children and for this reason calls for healthy and equal partnership as both entities aims at the successful growth and learning of children.



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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE AND CONSENT FORM



#### SECTION A: Declaration to the

**Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee**  
NHREC Reference Number REC-110613-036

#### RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE (APPLICATION)

I, **Henry James Nichols** (The researcher) hereby confirm that:

1. The information provided in this ethics clearance application to undertake research with human participants is accurate to the best of my knowledge;
2. I understand the principles of conducting ethical research;
3. I will endeavor to conduct all the research in an ethical manner as prescribed by Faculty and University rules; and
4. I will inform the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (REC) of any substantive changes to the project that might impact on the ethical clearance of the project.
5. This project has not been submitted to another REC or Review Board for review

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature - Researcher / Student

5 May 2019

Please select one:

- ☐ This *student research project (up to Masters level)* and associated ethics application have both been approved by the relevant Department or Centre of the Faculty of Education for submission to the REC.
- ☒ This *student research project (PhD)* and associated ethics application have both been approved by the relevant Doctoral Committee for submission to the REC.
- ☐ This *staff research project* and associated ethics application have both been approved by the relevant Department or Centre of the Faculty of Education for submission to the REC
- ☐ This *student group research project* and associated ethics application have both been approved by the relevant Department or Centre of the Faculty of Education for submission to the REC. This application covers the broad ethical issues pertaining to the group project.
- ☐ This *external research project proposal* and associated ethics application have both been submitted to the Faculty of Education REC for approval.
- ☐ This *UJICE project* and associated ethics application has been approved by the UJICE Management for submission to the relevant committees of the Faculty of Education.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature - Supervisor / Staff Researcher / External Researcher

5 May 2019

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg, Updated January 2018  
Please report any instance of unethical research practice to [geoffl@uj.ac.za](mailto:geoffl@uj.ac.za) or 011 559 3016



## APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

NHREC Registration Number REC-110613-036



### ETHICS CLEARANCE

Dear Henry Nichols

**Ethical Clearance Number: Sem 1 2019-048**

#### **PARENTS WHO AFFIRM THE SAME-SEX SEXUALITIES OF THEIR CHILDREN AND THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH SCHOOL**

Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student to submit a new application.
- It remains the student's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

**The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to**

- ☒ Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
- ☐ Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
- ☐ Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Sincerely,

Dr David Robinson  
Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
5 May 2019

## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



SECTION D: Signatures required to indicate consent/assent  
(For all participants, parents, guardians and other stakeholders)

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee  
NHREC Reference Number REC 110613-036

### INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT FORM

*Project Title:*  
Parents who Affirm the Same-sex Sexualities of their Children and their Experiences with School Involvement

*Investigator:*  
Henry James Nichols  
contact numbers: 0612069469(cell)

*Date:*  
1 July 2018

*Please mark the appropriate checkbox. I hereby:*

- ☒ Agree to be involved in the above research project as a participant.  
☐ Agree to be involved in the above research project as an observer to protect the rights of:  
☐ Children younger than 18 years of age;  
☐ Children younger than 18 years of age that might be vulnerable\*; and/or  
☐ Children younger than 18 years of age who are part of a child-headed family.  
☐ Agree that my child, \_\_\_\_\_ may participate in the above research project.  
☐ Agree that my staff may be involved in the above research project as participants.

- ☒ I have read the research information sheet pertaining to this research project (or had it explained to me) and I understand the nature of the research and my role in it.  
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study.  
I understand that my personal details (and any identifying data) will be kept strictly confidential.  
I understand that I may withdraw my consent and participation in this study at any time with no penalty.

*Signature:*

*Please provide contact details below ONLY if you choose one of the following options:*

- ☐ Please allow me to review the report prior to publication. I supply my details below for this purpose;  
☐ Please allow me to review the report after publication. I supply my details below for this purpose;  
☐ I would like to retain a copy of this signed document as proof of the contractual agreement between myself and the researcher

*Name:*

*Phone or Cell number:*

*e-mail address:*

Ruan Coetser  
0799630001  
ruan@qmail.com

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg, updated April 2017  
Report any instance of unethical research practice to the Chair of the REC [geoff@uj.ac.za](mailto:geoff@uj.ac.za) or 011 559 3016



## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview schedule for parents of same-sex sexual orientation child:

1. Could you please tell me some things about yourself? (Just to put the participant at ease).
2. What is your understanding of same-sex identity or (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender)?
3. When was the first time you became aware of your child's same-sex identity?
4. How did you find out about your child's same-sex identity?
5. What were your reaction upon hearing about your child's same-sex identity?
6. What influenced your understanding and reaction when coming to know your child's same-sex identity?
7. What do you think your child' same-sex identity school life was like?
8. Were you aware of any homophobic bullying of your child in school? If yes, how did you come to know about it?
9. If you answered the previous question with yes, what sort of homophobic bullying did your child had to go through?
10. Do you think your child was treated differently or even bullied in the schooling space? Could you please elaborate with example if this was the case?
11. Was there any communication from the school side on your child being bullied due a heteronormative or heterosexist school culture? Please elaborate with examples.
12. In your opinion, do you think the heteronormative and heterosexist school culture towards your child could have been omitted if there was communication between you as the parent of a same-sex identity and the heteronormative and

heterosexist school culture?

13. Are you aware of any programmes at school which involves parents of same-sex identity adolescents? Please elaborate if this was the case?
14. Would you, as a parent, be part of such a home school partnership if it was established? How would you like such a partnership to be established? Please elaborate on your answer.
15. If you answered yes to the previous question in that you would like a home school partnership to be formed, how would you go about creating such a home-school partnership?
16. In your opinion, would such a home-school partnership change the heteronormative and heterosexist schooling space? Please elaborate.
17. Could you tell whether your child's same-sex identity influenced your child's academic performance and his/her psychosocial wellbeing? Could you enlighten me on this please?
18. What do you as a parent want from the school for your child to have a safe and inclusive space in school?
19. Is there anything that you would like to add which I have not addressed in my questions?
20. Has the school ever been in contact with you regarding the bullying of your same-sex identity child? If so, how?
21. Would you have liked the school to have reported some of these events if they took place?

Interview schedule with the same-sex orientation individual:

1. Could you please tell me some things about yourself? (Just to put the participant at ease).
1. When was the first time you told your parents/ parent of your same-sex identity and how did you "come out"?
2. How did your parents/ parent find out about your same-sex identity and what

was your age at that time?

3. What was the initial reaction from your parents when realising your same-sex identity?
4. What was your school life living as a same-sex identity adolescent? Did the school know of your non-heterosexual orientation?
5. Did you find your school to be heteronormative and heterosexist space? If yes, could you provide me with examples?
6. Were you bullied or treated differently from your heterosexual peers in school? If yes, what type of bullying did you experience?
7. If you were bullied or treated different from your heterosexual peers, did you report this to your school or parents? If so, how did they respond?
8. Do you believe that if your parents and school worked together, it would have made a difference in your schooling experience? If yes, how?
9. In your opinion, were you treated differently from your heterosexual peers? Could you elaborate on this experience?
10. What was the initial response from your parents upon learning about your same-sex identity and what do you think influenced their views and perceptions towards people other than heterosexual?
11. As a same-sex identity individual, what do you think would have made your schooling experience more pleasurable?
12. Do you think, as a same-sex identity individual while in school, had an influence on your academic performance and psychosocial wellbeing? Please elaborate on this.
13. Would you have liked your parents and school to work toward creating a safe space for you as a same-sex identify adolescent? Could you please elaborate on your answer?
14. Are you aware of any programmes or policies that protects same-sex identity adolescents while in school?
15. Is there anything that you would like to add which I have not addressed in my questions?

## APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIPTIONS AND TRANSLATIONS\

### ENGLISH

Susan

**Henry:** When did you first find out that your son was gay?

**Susan:** I knew from when he was still very young, two years old, but he only told me in his matric year. But on the day he told me. The thoughts came back that I was supposed to realise it earlier.

**Henry:** Why two years old?

**Susan:** At that stage... he wanted to do all the things that girls wanted to do and he enjoyed playing... with my high heels most... and teddybears. Those were his favourite toys. He did play with cars sometimes, but then he colour-coded them. All of his play cars were in his toybox and he put all the green ones and all the yellow ones together. He didn't race them on a track. These were the first thoughts that came to my mind, the wearing of my high heels, when he told me.

**Henry:** What was your initial reaction?

**Susan:** When he told me?

**Henry:** yes

**Susan:** Well, from an early age I told my kids, both of them that they can tell me everything. They can come to me with anything. They can tell me anything. Because I made a promise to them, also with the personal things that happened in my life. But

I made a promise, I might be angry, I might be sad, or don't like what they are telling me, or may even be disappointed. My first reaction wasn't shocked, like I said, when he finally told me I realised that I was actually supposed to know. The second thing was sadness. I wasn't sad about the fact that he was gay, I was sad because he had to go through this lonely road all by himself. That is why I felt sorry for him. And that now I knew about it, he will experience rejection and there was nothing I was able to do about it.

**Henry:** Do you think he experienced this rejection while he was in school?

**Susan:** Yes, I think so but he never spoke about it. Like I said, he was never open about it. In school, he was this type of guy that had many girlfriends. I actually thought he was this jock amongst the girls (chuckles). Because he had a girlfriend with which he would social. And then he had other girlfriends which were more serious about things. So yes, he had many girlfriends and with Valentine's balls he had the most stunning girls at his side. So yes, I think he had to pretend while he was in school.

**Henry:** Do you think he was bullied in school?

**Susan:** He was bullied in school, or so I suspect. But he never told me in so many words.

**Henry:** Why do you suspect it?

**Susan:** Because he was never the sporty, jock type of guy. He was more into culture, that type of guy. He was the type of guy that did choir and drama. Those were his interests. Where his brother, they differ like day and night. Totally different. The teachers didn't even want to believe they were brothers. They don't even look like each other even though they have the same father. Two totally different personalities. Where the younger brother was more into sport, he even wanted to go to school earlier just to go play ball. Where Bertus was more a normal child. Hehe had to... go sit and study to pass his exams. He stressed very easily. He was much more emotional. He was the type that if we went for a walk, he would pick a flower and give it to me. Where

his brother would comment and say when we are going to finish the walk. But Bertus was a much more emotional child. So, I did expect it. But also remember this was 10 or 12 years ago when he finished school. It was different from what it is now.

**Henry:** You said that he was possibly bullied. Why do you say so?

**Susan:** Because he easily showed his emotions, he easily cried, because he was so sensitive. Because like, he would feel sorry and show care towards a small insect, where other boys would just step on it and kill it. He would pick them up and try to help it. That is why I suspected it because the guys that would not show that they were sensitive... Bertus never spoke about it, about all the things that happened at school. I think both of us just want to keep silence on that topic. To a certain extent. But it is not that we have a bad relationship. In fact, he calls me every day and we talk every day. While with his brother, you would call and he wouldn't answer. He would send a Whatsapp and say that he will let me know I can give him a call (giggles). So, you understand, they are like opposites.

**Henry:** Do you think the school or some of the kids knew that he was gay?

**Susan:** No. even his best girl friend almost fell backwards when he told her that he was gay. He always tells the funny story of ... they sat outside of my room and chilled with bottle of potency or something, and then he said listen Marina, I just want to tell you that I'm gay. So, she almost downed the whole bottle. She didn't know at all. And I mean they spent weekend together. So no, she didn't even know.

**Henry:** So, you think it was a lonely road?

**Susan:** That is why I am saying that when he told me, I thought to myself how alone and scared and insecure he must have been for so many years. And that feeling of doubt of whether I am or not... gay. I can't tell anyone. Too scared of rejection.

**Henry:** What effect do you think this had on his time in school? I understand that it is difficult to understand because you weren't aware of it at that time, but what do you think?

**Susan:** Look, about his school work itself, I really don't know. He had to study for his exams. I just know that his circle of friends was very small. He only had girlfriends. That's why I thought he was the jock amongst the girls (giggle). He never really had boyfriends.

**Henry:** Do you think if the school was aware of his non-heterosexual orientation, they would have notified you?

**Susan:** Most probably. Because remember the schools in those years were very conservative. The school had Christian principals, which was good for me. But the way they did things were very conservative.

**Henry:** Can you think of an example?

**Susan:** An example of conservative? Ummm... it was that thing of, things aren't supposed to be done like that. A person is not like that. I almost want to say that we as Afrikaners (white speaking Afrikaans) have these boxes. I almost want to say that if you have a normal life, then you fit into that box. You go to school, you go to university, you get engaged, get a good job, and get a child blah blah blah. Then you fit into the box. But as soon as you are homosexual or you fall pregnant before you are married, or change of work every year, then you are outside of the box. So, it is not done that way. But I can't think of a specific example right now.

**Henry:** Let's say you were aware of your child's non-heterosexual orientation in school, do you think you would have acted differently into his schooling?

**Susan:** I think I would have been more protective due to the fact that I know how sensitive he is and was. Because I knew how easily he got upset and anxious and things like that and would have liked to limit those things to protect him. To teach him, and myself, to not be bothered by others. Be who you are and love yourself the way you are. I accept you for who you are and everyone, including your family and your immediate circle of friend will not reject you for it. So just be yourself. Don't be bothered by others. I know the words of kids and people can be hurtful... but if you know who you are and be comfortable with who you are... I mean if I knew before I could have helped more.



**Henry:** So, would you have liked to know earlier, if it was your choice?

**Susan:** I really don't know. I was a single mother from when he was only three, so at that stage it was firstly just to survive. Financially it didn't go well. Secondly, it was a thing of me being a single mother, and the critique of your child is gay so you are probably a bad mother. Your child DOES not want to play sport, so what was wrong with me. At that stage it was like to show people that I can look after my children, I can take care of them. To show them that my children are normal and balanced and that they are getting a good education in a good school. I am doing my utmost best. Si it was more about the image, from the family's side, because I was the black sheep. Look, the father was nowhere to be found. He didn't even pay custody support. I think the last time we saw him was when the youngest was only in Sub-A and then when Bertus was Grade 4. And after that no contact. They did, however, made contact two years ago. That happened through me.

**Henry:** Was the father aware of his sexuality?

**Susan:** I recall something about when he was in high school, I'm not sure through their other grandmother, and they live in another province. I recall they sent Bertus letters at that stage. They sent him some money when he did well. It was in his matric year when his father made contact with him. He then mentioned it to his father. In 2016 his father came and apologised for everything... and that he wanted their numbers and such. The younger brother immediately said yes but Bertus first said he wanted to think about it. He only said after a day or two that I can give his number to his father. And then I also told his father that he was gay, and that if he was going to reject him based on his sexuality then he will have to deal with me. Because really, the whole family accepted him. His brother was the last to know and he was very chilled about it. He actually was upset to why he was the last one to know (chuckles). I think my dad at first struggled with it because he comes from the old generation, but besides him, everyone accepted him.

I think he was scared. He was insecure about himself and struggled with himself. Is it

like that or not (him being gay)? Is it a sin or is it not? If the Lord also going to reject him? Will my mom and family reject me? I think it was all about rejection. Because he had a real good relationship with all of his cousins and myself. We are very close. The fear of now I need to carry this burden by myself.

**Henry:** Do you think if the school knew about his sexuality and accepted it would have made a difference in his school life?

**Susan:** I think if the school knew about it and made it easier for the children, that they would have come out of the closet earlier. And then people can actually address the issue of bullying. Then people can be more open about it. Then I also think they wouldn't have the fear of going to school like today I have to see that one and what he is doing to me or those type of things. They would have been more relaxed and be more spontaneous. I am that type of person that, if I knew, I would have gone to the school, and told the principal that my child is gay and that if I ever hear the school or any of the teachers attempt any type of discrimination ...

**Henry:** How would you have preferred the school should have notified you if the school knew about your child's sexuality and there was a problem with that at school?

**Susan:** I think they would have called me for an appointment with the principal, called me and said that they want to talk to me. I would have immediately thought by myself, oh what did they brake and how I'm going to pay for it (laughing). I really think they

would have done it. They would have called me in privately and told me about it. I don't even think they would have used the word gay. They would probably have said that did you know that your son is that way... I actually don't even know whether they would have used the term homosexual. They would probably have said your son is (skeef) curved. Or they would have said your child is a (moffie) faggot. Whether they would have been sensitive about it, I don't know.

**Henry:** And if they know he was bullied, would they have done anything about it?

**Susan:** No, no. Even today schools don't even do it.

**Henry:** What would have made it easier for your child when he was in school? Like for example a teacher he could have talked to or a policy that was in place?

**Susan:** If there were councillors at the school with whom he could have spoken to in private, it does not even have to be a psychologist, even though it would have been the best. Someone that is trained and educated about such things. If there were councillors whose passion is kids, and not only notice and give attention to kids whose parents are abusing them, or who is really poor, not that I'm saying that it is not important, but all of those are the ones first attended to. If there were councillors who were objective and acted as outsiders, which would have made it easier for the children, being a safe haven. I think it is a big thing. Because not all gay children will be comfortable just telling anyone. To say here I can talk, here I can listen, here I can cry and here I can swear, they need a space where they can relive their frustrations and shout.

**Henry:** Do you think that was the case with your child?

**Susan:** Yes, he was frustrated but I just saw it as teenager moods. So yes, he was frustrated and circumstances at home was also like, he didn't have his private space. It was really a tough time (financially). Like he and his brother had to share a room until he was in matric. So, he didn't have his own space. He went to a girl friend of his many times, so he went there on Friday's and came back on Sunday's. But I didn't

think of it at that stage that it might be an escape for him.

**Henry:** If there was a councillor at school and your son did confided in him/her, would you have wanted to know the content of the discussions?

**Susan:** No, not the content. Like I said it needs to come from his point of view and I think, he doesn't want his mother to know everything. I mean there are still things, even though we are close, there is a line, even though we go out (clubs) together. Uhm, I was very young, I'm only 17 years older than him, so we socialise together, go to clubs and such things but there is a line. So yes, there are still things, because it has nothing to do with me, it is his life. So, with the councillor, what they said I don't want to know. What she said, and what I was supposed to know, then that would have been good.

**Henry:** Do you think his school was homophobic?

**Susan:** Yes, I think so. It was very traditional; Afrikaner and it had a good reputation. So, I think it was still... so yes, I always say that I think the English schools were more relaxed about such things.

**Henry:** If your child were bullied, how do you think he was bullied?

**Susan:** I think it was verbally. I could never see something physical on his body like scars or something. If there were such under his clothes... I think it was verbally and emotional.

**Henry:** How sure are you that he was verbally abused?

**Susan:** I can't say it with certainty. It's just a speculation. I have no prove. He never told me that people said this or that.

**Henry:** Has he ever told you anything about him being gay in school?

**Susan:** No. you know, there was this one time, there were a few drinks involved, he just said something about one time in the school bathrooms, but further I don't know

anything.

**Henry:** What do you think he meant by that?

**Susan:** You know, there are many things going through your head, like if they cornered him, or they could have ... I don't even want to think about it, but they could have raped him, that they said that you want to be gay ... you want to be different, so let us show you what is different. So many things went through my mind. What exactly what was said and done, I don't know. We never spoke about it. Look, we speak now, but like if he had a one-night stand, I don't have to know about that. It's his life. But since he told me I became involved, and read books and spoke to him about it. He even gave me a book and asked me to read it. At times I was shocked, but then I am also like ok, now I know better. I mean it was after school.

**Henry:** So even though he didn't say anything, you knew he had a tough time in school?

**Susan:** Yes, I think so. It couldn't have been otherwise.

**Henry:** If he told you two years prior to when he actually told you that something is wrong, what would you have done if you knew that your child was treated differently to his heterosexual peers?

**Susan:** I would have gone and speak about it. I have always been a hands-on mom, since they were very small. I have been to every concert, at every parent evening. If I knew anything about it, I would definitely gone and speak about it.

**Henry:** And if the school knew?

**Susan:** If the school knew and didn't tell me anything, I would have been very disappointed. I wouldn't been able to change the things that happened but I could prevent it from happening again. And if they didn't do anything about it, I would have taken my child out of school

**Henry:** Let's say the school was positive about it and told you that they were aware of it and you didn't know about it, what could you have done together to make it easier

for your child?

**Susan:** I really don't know. I hope that if it happened, that they have told me and that other children and their parents would come out with it and that it wasn't only me. I believe other parents would have come forward as well. Schools, today still give preference to top achievers and top sports, it is just the way it is. If there was a programme in schools that said let's get other parents in, let's talk about this, maybe them struggling to accept it and let give counselling to both the parents and the children. Even now, and my child is out of school, I would like to get involved in such a programme. What I think is important that you know it is your child. I know many parents don't see it that way but (help) hell, you can't push your child away based on his sexuality. I see it with so many of my son's friends. I tell them to come here. I want to meet them. I want to learn from them. So many of them that were in school at that time told me (jissie tannie) mam, I enjoy being here because I can just be who I am. I want to know. I want to be involved.

**Henry:** How big a role did your religion play in when you found out that your child was gay?

**Susan:** You know, I think it depends on the personal relationship you have with your child. Yes, when they were very young, I was that type to hit them on the forehead with the Bible. Because remember, I needed to be the good mother. I even did Sunday school lessons. But I do think it laid a good foundation for them. For me, I wasn't troubled with that.

## SAME-SEX SEXUAL ORIENTATION YOUTH

ENGLISH

GERRIE

**Henry:** What was your age when you came out to your parents?

**Gerrie:** I was 18, on my last day of matric.

**Henry:** How did you go about doing it?

**Gerrie:** My mom got divorced when I was very young, so we have been very close from a young age. And it was on the last day of school, and I don't know why, but I told myself that on the last day of school that I am going to tell her because I was not willing to live a lie and pretend for the rest of my life. I am opposed to that. So, either she is going to accept it or she is going to chase me away. So, the whole day I was walking around thinking by myself how I was going to go about doing it, and how she is going to take it. I then just told her that we need to talk. It was difficult because now she knows that I want to tell her something and is wondering what it is going to be. It was ironic, because we were sitting and watching Finding Nemo (laughing). When I said I want to tell her, there was a silence. I then told her and she said that she expected it and just waited for me to tell her about it. Just after she accepted it so well, I went to all my girlfriends and family and told them as well. I a sense I was one of the lucky ones because no one had a problem with it. We are also one of those families where we don't with such things on our faces

**Henry:** And what about your father?

**Gerrie:** I last saw him when I was 8. Uhhh, so two years ago, out of the blue he made contact with me via WhatsApp. I wondered at first where he got my number from. I asked my mom then, and she told me that she gave him my number. He apparently wanted to say sorry. So, I said, ok, and we chatted for a while, but I did tell my mother that in my eyes he has always been dead. I don't know him and he never tried to be



there for me. I that same here my brother called me to ask whether I heard that my father passed away. Then I said ok, because there goes all the questions, I wanted to ask him. But he knew that I was gay because I told him about it and he said it is fine and that it was my choice. I never really spoke about it in detail...

**Henry:** Tell me, were you out in school?

**Gerrie:** that so many things made sense now because we were so close. I had many girlfriends in school. Yes, I had girlfriends whom I was in relationships with because there was this thing of an image you had to uphold so that you don't give yourself away. I think in the times of 2006 was when things started changing. More guys started to ... begin to be more sensitive. Not really sensitive but more like starting to look after themselves so it was difficult to see if a guy was straight or gay. Even today, you can't tell whether a guy is straight or gay by the way he dresses.

**Henry:** How was school for you as a gay guy?

**Gerrie:** It was just OK. I did my sports and culture. I had my friends and girlfriends so I never really had issues. I didn't have any bad experiences and nobody really suspected me being gay. It was, however, a very lonely feeling in the beginning because you don't really know... many people say it's just a phase that you are going through because in standard 6 and 7, you don't really know what's going on with your body and you don't really know what you are supposed to be feeling... because everyone says you must have a girlfriend but you don't really have an emotional feeling

towards the opposite sex. In the beginning you think it is just a phase so you just leave it. But later you realise that things aren't the way it is supposed to be and that the attraction is not as strong as with what you are experiencing towards a guy, but I never showed it. School is a very vicious place.

**Henry:** Have you ever experienced any homophobia in your school such as name-calling or any such?

**Gerrie:** Luckily not. I played it safe. I acted the way I was supposed to and what was expected of me. I just told myself that I'm not going to expose myself to that, so I sucked it up, pretended and put on the face during the day.

**Henry:** And other gay children in your school?

**Gerrie:** I only knew about two but it was more hearsay. People only heard or thought it but no one really knew. They were called names but I didn't really give any attention to it. Maybe it is because if you start making friends with them other kids will start noticing you... so I just stayed where I was and let them have their own group.

**Henry:** Do you think that your sexuality or questioning your sexuality had any effect on your schooling such as academics or social life?

**Gerrie:** I think it was more sport, because I loved sport. But because you don't know what is going on... but the whole thing of the dressing rooms that you had to go with other guys, and you go on tours with, that was difficult. I think that it made it difficult for me because I was very unsure about myself while in school. I didn't have a good self-image. So it was don't do certain things because maybe they will think... and say bad things about you and bad mouth you. Like don't do that because that is not manly and maybe they will call you a faggot (moffie). So rather do your cultural things such as choir and dancing because straight guys are also doing it so no one will say anything.

**Henry:** What would have happened if people knew that you were gay?

**Gerrie:** Kids are cruel. They will make things up. Like in a group they will make stories up and then tell it to everyone. If you go against them, then you will have to deny everything... it is difficult. It was something that you could not win.

**Henry:** How did your mom support you in school while knowing you were gay?

**Gerrie:** she didn't really know about anything. I just went on pretending everything was fine. When we spoke, she just said that she can't imagine what I had to go through because of the fact that I had to pretend at home as well as at school. You can't really be who you want to be. You can't say what you want to say. You just pretend to like what other boys liked. A parent just knows these things but she never spoke about it.

**Henry:** if you were out in school, and everyone accepted you being gay, would your life be any different?

**Gerrie:** I would have done more. I wouldn't have been scared to do some things. I would have been more involved in things that I liked. That is also why I left choir because it is something only faggots (moffies) do. If more people said it was OK and let you be yourself and more people supported you... because it is just so, male teachers in school, they don't understand. It's probably the era they grew up in so you couldn't really speak to them about it. Also, you couldn't go speak to the female teachers because they were more involved with the girls. And if you dare talk to someone about it, because maybe it will get out, or someone will tell on you.

**Henry:** Do you think you would have received support if you were to be out about your sexuality in school?

**Gerrie:** I was very close to some of my girlfriends so now and then someone will say that if you do this, or if you do that then you will be seen as gay (other guys). Then they will just say it is fine and we will still love him even if he was gay. But I have also learned that it is much easier to say something if you are not in that situation and you are not going through it yourself.

**Henry:** And the teachers?

**Gerrie:** The young teachers will understand better. But other will ... you need to get married, go to varsity, get a job and have children. Also, you don't change from churches. I think it would have been difficult for them as well.

**Henry:** Do you think a teacher would have helped you if you went to him/her for help with the fact that you were gay?

**Gerrie:** You didn't have a choice. You played a male sport such as rugby or cricket and that is it. It is not like... they wouldn't understand.

**Henry:** And if one of the teachers were welcoming to the fact that you are gay, would it have made a difference?

**Gerrie:** I think it would because you would have known someone is there for you and that you could in a sense could talk about these things... or if you say that you are struggling. Things would have been different because people look up to teachers. If there were more support than people would have been more comfortable with it. There is also a type of stereotype that if you are a boy you have to do certain manly things and if you are a girl you are expected to do girly stuff. Also, if they were more educated about these things then maybe they would have been more supportive and tell us to come and talk to us. They could have said that they may not have all the answers but they would try to help. Maybe they (teachers) will also not go and tell our families.

**Henry:** Let's say you were out, and your mom was involved and supportive of your homosexual sexuality, would it have made a difference in your whole school experience?

**Gerrie:** I think so because then I wouldn't have felt so alone. Then you would have thought you could conquer the world because you have that support. Say from Standard 6, it would have made a difference in anyone's life.

**Henry:** Were there any structures or policies in your school who could support and help people that are non-heterosexual?

**Gerrie:** There weren't any of those. Because they would be like do, we know you, do you play any sport? They would classify you on that.

**Henry:** what kept you from coming out at school?

**Gerrie:** You wouldn't have wanted to go to school... like go through the gates and people would like say here comes the faggot (moffie). People would look at you in a strange way or hide your bags. Like people who were seen as computer geeks... they would hide your things or lock your bikes... people just don't like things like that. People should go to school to learn and not look over your shoulder all the time. It is not a nice feeling. Like you should walk a certain way talk in the right way as well as what you wear. It will be a give-away.

**Henry:** Do you think if your mom knew earlier that your school experience as a gay man would have been different?

**Gerrie:** I am not sure because her being a single mother, she had to give all her attention to her work and three children so I couldn't expect her to give all her attention to me. She tried her best to be involved but at times it was just not possible. I think if there were two parents, it would have been different. But she had to fulfil two roles. When we grew up, church was very important to her. What the Bible said was it. Also, the music that we wanted to listen to, she first wanted to listen to the lyrics and we weren't allowed to watch movies above the age restrictions. She was very strict. I think she would have been judgemental, I think, and would have told me that we needed to go see someone and she would have tried to force it down on you.

**Henry:** Do you think your school academics was influenced with your struggle or development of your sexuality?

**Gerrie:** I think so yes because I would have been able to spend more time on my studies and less on what people think of me. Like you think about your schoolwork but at the same time how you need to pretend. Like you would study and then you think about the person you have feelings towards (guy) and then you need to go back. In my case, when things around me gets quiet I start thinking about all kind of things. I think if I knew more about what was going on, like the person you are attracted to, things would have been easier because you wouldn't sit with all these struggles and

you don't know and then you still have to do schoolwork. You are insecure about everything.

**Henry:** you mentioned that you were ill-informed. Who would you have liked to give you more information and educate you on these matters?

**Gerrie:** I would say people that knows what teenagers are going through at that stage. Your whole body changes. Everything is a confusion. You don't know what is going on. It would have been helpful if there was a person, not necessarily a psychologist, but someone you could turn to confidential and know that everything you say will stay there. Someone that will say that let's see if we can sort this thing out. I think it would help many people. Because you have no one to go to. You can just say that I'm going to the teacher (female) to sort something out. You don't have to say why, and you can chat to her and she will help you sort things out and help you accept yourself. As soon as you can do that, it is one less thing to worry about.

**Henry:** If the school knew that you were gay, do you think they would have communicated it with your mom?

**Gerrie:** I don't know. Our principal was very old school. He would probably have said you must pray for your child. He would have asked what's going on with your child and that there is something wrong with your child. As I've said, he was very strict. Rugby and stuff were very important to him. It always took preference. All the other things weren't important. I think if he knew he would have said your child needs help. It wouldn't have been like let's see if we can get someone he can go talk to. He would have said something is wrong because something is not right.

**Henry:** And if your mom knew about problems you had and the school didn't, what would she have done?

**Gerrie:** I think she would have jumped in. she always put her children first. She would have protected us as far as she could. That is also one thing that she said to me. She didn't care that I was gay. What her worst fear is that she can't keep me safe from the world. She can't protect me from the cruel world and the comments, and that I am going to get them and that it's going to hurt. She would also have tried to help if she

was more educated and had someone to turn to for help and guidance regarding this matter. It would have been easier. We didn't see eye to eye when I was younger but it changed when I told her that I was gay. She said that so many things made sense to her now. She now knows where she stands with me and that she understands me better now and she can support me.

**Henry:** Would you say that your school is homophobic?

**Gerrie:** Yes, in a sense I do think so. Especially the boys but I have to say that we were very white and had many dads who played rugby so their sons also played rugby and cricket. They had certain expectations about their sons.

**Henry:** What did the teachers do when they saw or heard homophobic bullying?

**Gerrie:** there weren't really any fights, it was more name calling and stuff during break time. And if the guy (gay) said that he is going to tell the teachers, the other guys would tell him that they know where he lives. So, you actually just left it. So, you see how they intimidate people (gay). You feel bad for those people (gay) but you also don't want to interfere because then they will turn to you as well so you just leave it and see what happens.

**Henry:** Let's create this scenario and you put yourself in their (gay guys) shoes. What could you have done to make school life easier for them?

**Gerrie:** I think if there was someone that understood them and accepted them and told them just to push through school. If there was a support system telling these guys that you are not alone and that you don't have to go through this alone, and someone to talk to and who tried to make sense of things like your emotions, I can't say hormones, but just a support system where people can just say help us, we are struggling with these things, we don't know what is going on and whether this is normal? Is it perhaps a phase we are going through?

**Henry:** What kept you from coming out while in school?



**Gerrie:** I'm not sure. I think I didn't want to be called names and things. You want to accept. You don't want to sit alone during breaks and stand in a row and then everyone looks at you and call you names and stuff. You don't want to be alone.

**Henry:** Would it have made a difference if you told your mom earlier?

**Gerrie:** We would have fought less and she would have understood me better. It would have made our relationship better.

**Henry:** How old were you when you first thought that you were different?

**Gerrie:** I was around 14 or 15. In standard 6 you only come to realise that things are changing and you think that it is just a phase because in high school you think that everything is exciting. In standard 7 you realise that things aren't changing and you are still feeling the same way. But I still thought that it was just a phase. You do what is expected of you. You date a girl; you go to school balls with a girl. I do think, however, that things are changing. I spoke to another gay guy the other day and it is much easier for them. I also think it's because the teachers are younger. Because when I was in matric, it was there, but we didn't speak about it. Nobody really knew what to do with it.

## APPENDIX F: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE



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To whom it may concern

This document certifies that the manuscript below was edited for correct use of the English language, grammar, punctuation, spelling and overall style by Gillian Newton, certified language practitioner.

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SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS WHO  
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**AUTHOR:**

HENRY JAMES NICOLS

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